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# THE TIMES OF INDIA

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**Rastriya Swatantra Party bags a total of 182 seats in Nepal's parliamentary elections.** Having got a clear majority in the 275-member House of Representatives, RSP is now in a position to form the new govt with Balen Shah as PM, Pg opp

**Ukraine hits a key hub for Russia's network of crude-export pipelines in southern Krasnodar region.** As a result of the Ukrainian drone attack, a fire broke out at a terminal in Tikhoretsk, where an oil depot and pumping station are located, Pg opp

**Sunrisers Leeds buy Pakistan spinner Abrar Ahmed for 190,000 pounds (₹2.3cr) in England's inaugural men's Hundred auction,** making him the first Pakistani international signed by an Indian-owned franchise in the tournament

No other innings evokes such fond memories and awe as VVS Laxman's 281 at Eden Gardens in March 2001. Laxman shares his recollections of that epic knock exclusively for **TOI**, P 10

## DOUBLE DELIGHT

Today's issue of **TOI** is organised in two sections, both equally packed with news and analysis.
To get the full reading experience of today's edition, make sure you don't miss the other section

**OTHER BOOK TOP STORIES**

- **SC: Income can't be sole decider of OBC creamy layer**
- **CBI takes over 2 Guj digital arrest cases involving ₹31cr**
- **The story of our times and the tesseract of truth**

# Hormuz Strait to stay closed: Mojtaba's first message as Iran's supreme leader

## Asks Gulf Nations To Shut US Military Bases

**Tehran:** Iran's new supreme leader ordered his forces to keep the vital Strait of Hormuz shipping lane shut on Thursday, as Tehran launched more devastating attacks on Gulf energy targets that sent global oil prices soaring.

**FULL COVERAGE: P 3, 5 & 8**

The International Energy Agency warned the West Asia war could lead to "the largest supply disruption" in history but US President Trump said stopping the Islamic republic's "evil empire" was more important than crude prices.

Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, who was reportedly injured in an air strike, has yet to appear publicly since his nomination last Sunday as supreme leader, and his defiant first message was read by a newscaster on state television.

Khamenei, whose father and predecessor Ali Khamenei was killed in the first wave of US-Israeli attacks at the start of the war, called for Gulf countries to close their US military bases and vowed to avenge "the blood of our children and grandchildren". "The lever of blocking the Strait of Hormuz must definitely be used," Khamenei said of the waterway through which a quarter of the world's seaborne oil trade usually transits.

The Revolutionary Guards reacted swiftly, with the force's navy commander Alireza Tangsiri saying: "In response to the order of the commander-in-chief, we will deliver the harshest blows to the aggressor enemy while maintaining the strategy of closing the Strait of Hormuz." Under attack from Iran, shipping in and around Hormuz has been at a near-standstill for days. However, Iran's foreign ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baghaei said in comments carried by Mehr news agency that many ships can still pass through the Strait of Hormuz if they coordinate with the Iranian navy.

"After the current events, generally we cannot return to conditions before Feb 28 (start of current Iran war)... as we have understood how important the safety of the Strait of Hormuz is, and so did the others," Baghaei said. AFP AND REUTERS

▶40-50% rise in oil: Pg opp

### TEHRAN'S 3 CONDITIONS TO END WAR

**Iran Prez Masoud Pezeshkian** says he has reaffirmed the country's commitment to peace by talking to Russia and Pakistan, saying the only way to end the war is through 3 conditions: Recognising of Iran's legitimate rights; payment of reparations; and firm int'l guarantees against future aggression, Page opp

- **Gulf war is creating the biggest oil supply disruption in history,** International Energy Agency says
- **Rupee touches a fresh intra-day low and closes session 24 paise down** at its lowest level of 92.25 against US dollar, Other bk, P 9
- **Amid volatility, sensex closes at 76,034 points, down 829 points.** In the last two sessions, the index has lost close to 2,200 pts, Other bk, P 9

## US-owned ship attacked in Iraq, Indian dead

A US-owned oil tanker, Safesea Vishnu, sailing under the Marshall Islands flag, was attacked near Basra in Iraq on Wednesday, claiming the life of an Indian crew member. Another ship, Malta-flagged Zefyros, owned by a Greek entity, was also attacked, **reports Surendra Singh.**

The Indian embassy in Iraq confirmed the attack. "The remaining 15 Indian crew have since been evacuated to a safe place," the mission said in a series of posts on X. The Indian embassy in Baghdad is in regular contact with Iraqi authorities and offering rescued Indian sailors assistance, it said.

▶Offering help, P 5

# US launches trade inquiries on India, 14 other countries

## Section 301 Probe Opens Door For Slapping Penalties

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** As part of its tariff pressure, the US Trade Representative has launched a section 301 investigation against 15 countries, including India, to ascertain if there is structural excess capacity and production in manufacturing sectors.

Based on the outcome of the probe — which follows US Supreme Court's rejection of Trump's reciprocal tariff using emergency powers — the USTR can impose penalties on the countries whose policies are seen to be hurting American interests.

While identifying solar modules, petrochemicals and steel among areas where India has "created significant excess capacity", USTR Jamieson Greer said that the country's trade surplus sectors include textiles, health, construction goods, and automotive goods.

▶Supply chain: Other bk, P9

### NOW, IT'S SEC 301

- Under Sec 301, USTR to probe 'structural excess capacity' in India-made **solar modules, petrochemicals and steel. Textiles,** construction goods, **health** and automotive goods also under lens
- Other countries/groups targeted include **China, EU, Singapore, Vietnam,** B'desh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, S Korea
- USTR plans to release a docket for comments, begin **hearings from May 5**

## Kids' welfare above fgn court orders: HC

Orders passed by foreign courts in custody matters cannot override concerns about the welfare of children, Delhi high court has said, rejecting a plea by a Pakistani-origin man that his Indian wife return their kids, both British citizens, to the UK. It pointed out that the children are living in a family environment for more than two years. TNN

## Retail inflation rises to 3.2% in Feb

Led by an increase in food & beverages and personal care & effects, retail inflation rose an annual 3.2% in Feb, higher than the 2.7% in Jan, data released by the National Statistics Office shows. The Iran conflict is likely to add pressure. **Other bk, P 9**

## No spl treatment for anyone: Om Birla

A day after the no-confidence vote against him was rejected, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla resumed work and asserted he would stick to rules and wouldn't allow special treatment to any member, including the Leader of Opposition. **P 5**

## PM talks to Iran prez, stresses safety of Indians

PM Modi spoke to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian late Thursday and stressed the need for unimpeded flow of goods and energy, along with safety of Indians amidst the escalating conflict in West Asia.

▶India backs UN resolution against attacks by Iran, P 5

While India is yet to condemn the attacks on Iran, Modi posted on X that he expressed deep concern over the loss of civilian lives and damage to civilian infrastructure. TNN

## LPG crisis: Panic bookings, server crash trigger chaos

Anxiety over LPG shortage has spilled over to the domestic sector, fuelling panic bookings of cooking gas cylinders, while server glitches in the IVRS and other online booking systems are prompting people to queue up outside distribution agencies, fraying the nerves of consumers as well as suppliers across the country.

▶ Cognizant asks staff to get its own food: Other book, P 9

Despite govt's direction to prioritise domestic LPG, consumers said supplies on the ground remained uncertain. Dealers maintained that while commercial supply has come to a complete halt, domestic LPG supply has not been stopped but deliveries have slowed sharply.

Amid an unprecedented surge in bookings through digital platforms, including apps and websites, servers crashed, making people across cities dash to dealer outlets to get their cylinders refilled. Consumers across the country complained that IVRS numbers, WhatsApp booking channels and other systems were either inaccessible or unresponsive, and repeated attempts ended with the same message — "server down". TNN

▶For heavy traffic, P 5

## Ship led by Indian capt arrives in Mum from Saudi

**New Delhi:** A Liberian-flagged ship, "captained by an Indian national", loaded with crude oil from the Saudi port of Ras Tanura has arrived at the port of Mumbai, via the Strait of Hormuz, Mumbai Port Trust has informed, **reports Surendra Singh.**

Shenlong Suezmax, carrying 135,335 metric tonnes of crude oil, had departed from Saudi port on March 1 & reached Mumbai Wednesday, becoming the first vessel to safely navigate the strait to reach Indian shores amid the war.

▶No confirmation, P 5

# Low on cooking gas, trouble brews for Bengaluru's craft beer industry

**Nithya Mandyam & Jahnavi TR**

**Bengaluru:** The cooking gas crunch is beginning to hit Bengaluru's craft beer industry, with microbreweries warning of a production slowdown if supplies remain disrupted.

Boilers used in the brewing process at many craft breweries run on LPG. The shortage has left brewery owners worried about losing business during the peak summer season, when beer consumption is at its highest.

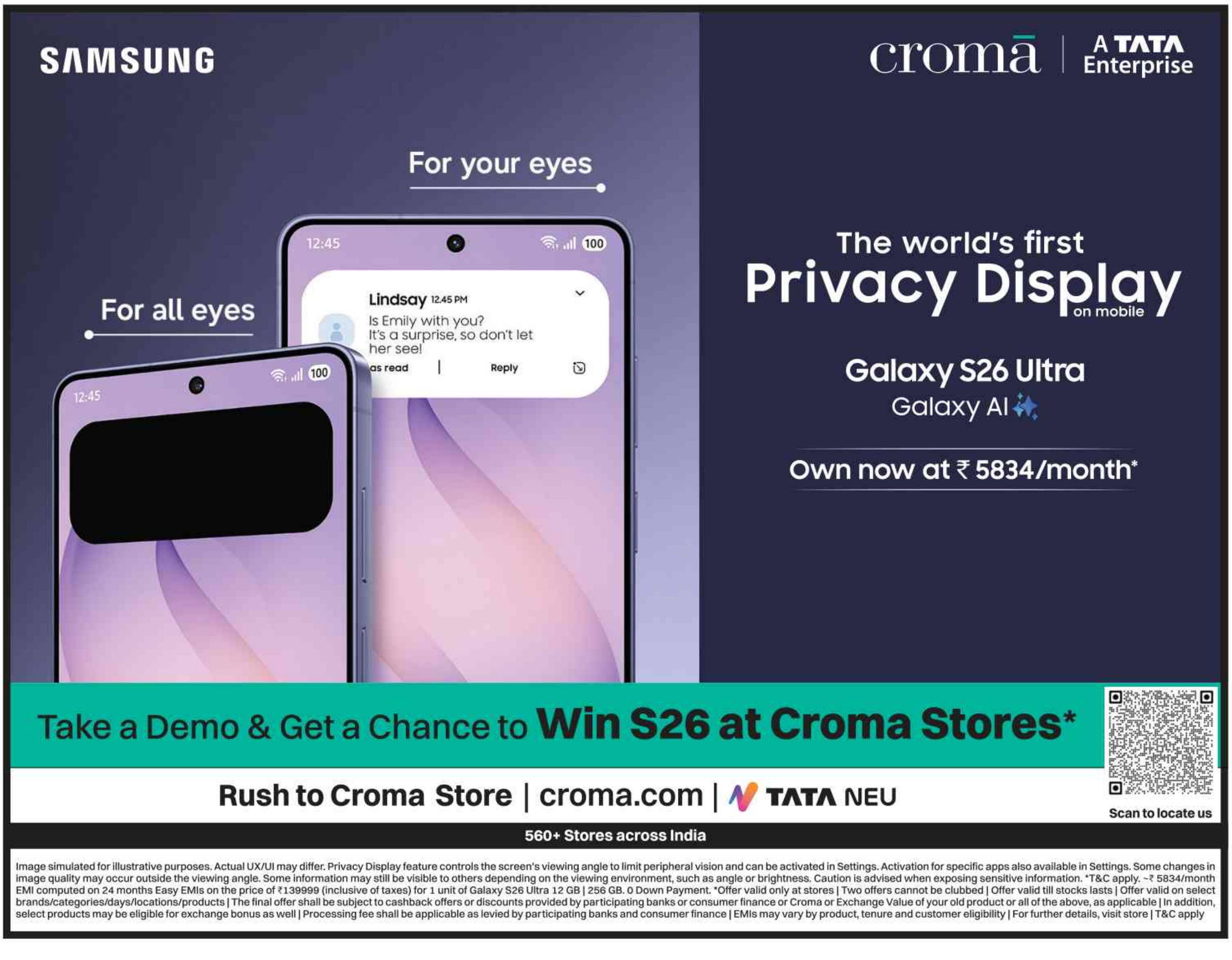
Depending on facility size and beer production volume, a craft brewery requires anywhere between 5 and 15 LPG cylinders daily to keep production running. With suppliers restricting the sale of industrial cylinders, some breweries are exploring alternative fuel options.

"We have enough stock of LPG to last until Sunday," said Mukesh Tolani, co-founder of Toit Brewpub. "To avoid disruption in production, we are speaking to our vendor to see if we can shift from LPG to diesel," he added.

### Mys craft rum distillery pauses production

Craft rum distillery Huli has paused operations after failing to procure cooking gas for its boiler. Aruna Urs, founder of the Mysuru-based distillery, said the unit was unable to secure LPG cylinders despite approaching both public sector and private suppliers. "Huli is closed from Monday as we are unable to procure LPG for our boiler," Urs said in an X post Thursday. "We had a public and a private supplier, and both categorically told us that they have been told to only refill domestic canisters." TNN

▶Cooking methods, P 4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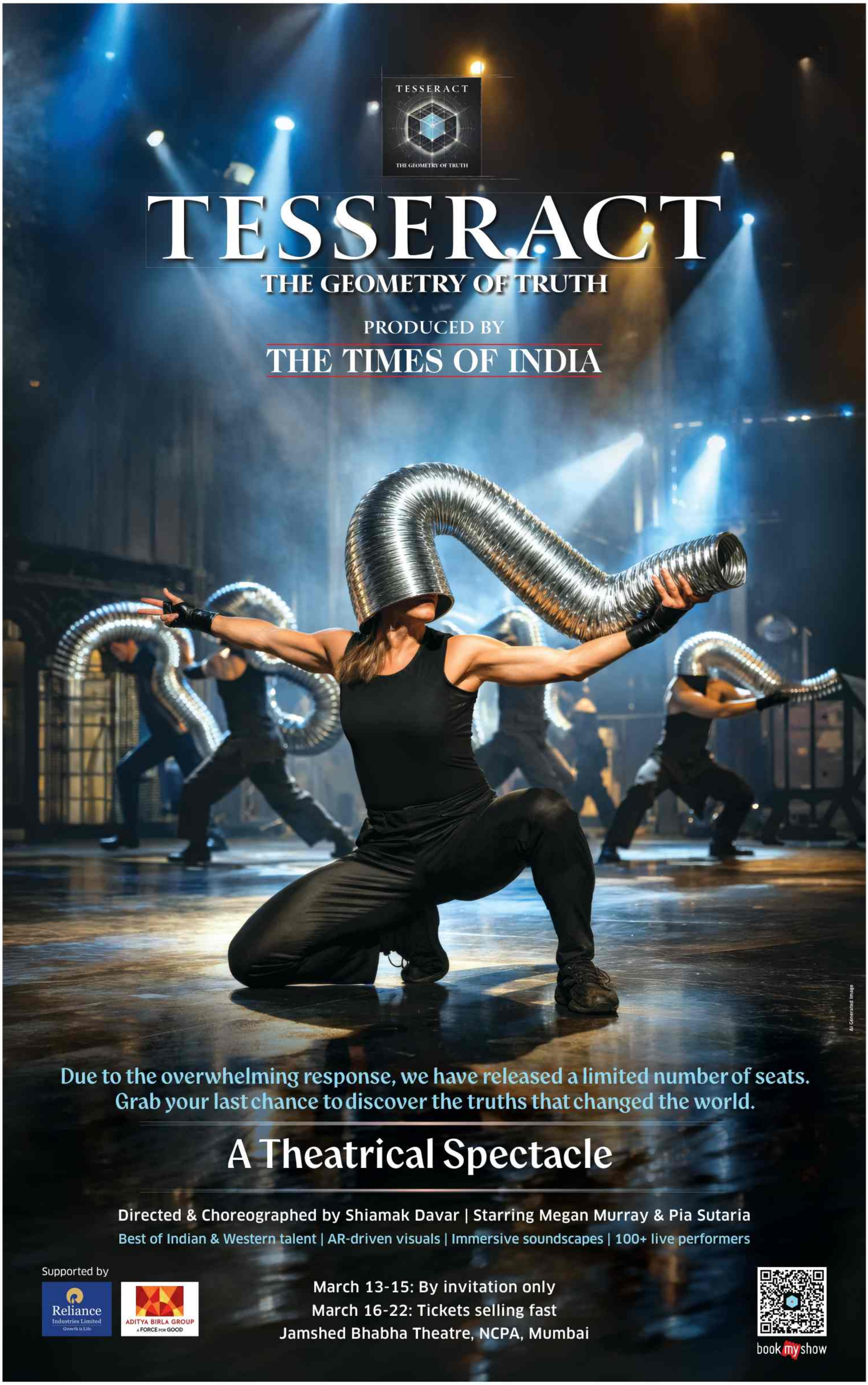
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WAR IN WEST ASIA, STRAIN ON KITCHENS: HOTEL ASSOCIATION SAYS EATERIES WON'T SHUT DOWN | LIMITED SUPPLY DISRUPTS DAILY LIFE IN BENGALURU

# Breather for hoteliers? LPG supply may resume soon

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Credit: Syed Asif, IANS

ADDED BURDEN: People queue up for LPG cylinders outside a gas agency in Bengaluru Thursday. With the Iranian govt allowing the passage of two ships carrying oil, the crisis is expected to be solved in 10 days, according to the food minister

SHUT FOR NOW: A CNG bunk on Mysuru Road was closed Thursday

**Bengaluru:** Hoteliers in Bengaluru are now relieved after oil companies assured them that supply of commercial LPG will resume soon, easing concerns triggered by disruptions linked to the ongoing West Asia crisis.

The Bangalore Hotels' Association said Thursday restaurants in the city will not shut down, adding that steps are being taken to resume services at establishments that had temporarily closed due to the shortage.

Association president PC Rao said oil companies assured them of resuming supply as they expected two carriers to reach Indian shores in a couple of days.

The association held an emergency meeting of hoteliers and decided to keep the eateries running. On Wednesday, the hoteliers met Karnataka chief secretary Shalini Rajneesh and also spoke to senior central govt officials and oil companies.

"Hotels require only about 13% of the LPG consumed in the city. Even if we are given half the amount, that is 7.5%, we will be able to run the eateries," Rao said. Meanwhile, hotels are also making alternative arrangements, including induction stoves and firewood, to tide over the fuel shortage.

### Price rise unlikely

The hoteliers' association said no collective decision was taken on increasing the prices. "We asked all hotels not to increase rates during the crisis. However, the association's recommendation is not binding on individual hotels, as they have their own financial commitments," Rao said.

BBHA honorary secretary Veerendra N Kamat said hotels will coordinate with each other to ensure supply of food. "Hotels that have a steady supply of fuel will help those facing shortages by sharing kitchens. Around 1,800 hotels have piped gas connections from GAIL," he said.

### No need to panic: Bengaluru DC

Bengaluru Urban district deputy commissioner G Jagadeesha said there is sufficient stock of domestic LPG cylinders in the district. He appealed to the public not to pay attention to rumours circulating on social media, and said there is no need to panic.

For any issues or grievances related to domestic LPG, the public may contact the helpline number 9611404384.

TOI

SURGE IN DEMAND FOR INDUCTION STOVES

## Cylinder crisis likely to stabilise in 7-10 days: Min

Food and civil supplies minister KH Muniyappa Thursday assured the legislative council that shortage of commercial LPG cylinders in the state will be resolved in 7-10 days.

Muniyappa will hold a meeting with oil companies Friday morning to review the supply situation and then discuss the issue with hotel owners' association. The minister said the govt is coordinating with Indian Oil Corporation and that Karnataka has adequate stocks for domestic consumption.

"Karnataka has at least 10 days of buffer stock for domestic cylinders. Further, on priority, we are prepared to supply commercial LPG to hospitals, hostels and schools. Households needn't panic," Muniyappa added.

He acknowledged that hotels, marriage halls and convention centres could face difficulties for a week as commercial LPG supply is being rationed. "But, with the Iranian govt allowing the passage of two ships carrying oil, even this concern shall be resolved in 10 days," he said.

## Apartment drops LPG rationing plan after residents raise concern

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Residents of Mantri Espana, an apartment complex in Bellandur, were informed Wednesday that LPG supply within the community would be restricted to fixed hours starting March 13. However, the proposal was later withdrawn after residents raised concerns and **TOI** sought clarification from the association.

In a message circulated to residents, the management committee said the complex typically consumes around 25 LPG cylinders a week but had only 12 cylinders in stock at the time. Although another 22 cylinders were expected from vendors, the association noted that supplies remained uncertain and had proposed rationing gas usage to ensure the available stock lasted longer. The plan was to limit gas supply through the central pipeline system to two-time windows each day: 5am to 9am and 6pm to 9pm. Residents were also asked to reduce gas usage and opt for alternatives such as induction stoves, rice cookers, and microwaves where possible.

"We were shocked. None of us heard of other apartment complexes in the area restricting gas supply," a resident said.

Association president Vartika Chopra said the idea was discussed as a precaution because the complex relied on commercial LPG supplied through a central pipeline system. "This was not an unilateral decision, but a step taken to rationalise and curb scarcity, given that the supply and its limited sources were brought to our attention. We will now follow the lead of other residential societies."

# Firewood fires up hotel kitchens

Nithya.Mandyam @timesofindia.com

Reuters

KEEPING THE FIRE ON: At many restaurants, workers are using firewood due to disruptions in commercial LPG supply. The price of firewood has also gone up

**Bengaluru:** As LPG supply disruptions continue to affect commercial kitchens across Bengaluru, traditional firewood cooking methods are making a comeback in many hotels and small eateries.

Restaurateurs who depend on LPG cylinders are turning to firewood stoves to keep their kitchens running, leading to a sharp rise in demand for firewood on the city's outskirts. Suppliers say while the demand has surged in the past few days, prices increased only marginally — by about Rs 100 per tonne — as traders try to support the hospitality sector during the crisis.

Firewood suppliers from the city's supply hubs in Doddaballapur, Nelamangala, Sira, Pavagada and Tumakuru said they are receiving continuous orders from hotels. "We normally sell firewood between Rs 6,000 and Rs 9,000 per tonne depending on the type and increased prices only by Rs 100 per tonne," said Uday KV, owner of Sri Krishna Enterprises, a supplier who sends truckloads of firewood to Bengaluru's hotel clusters.

According to firewood traders, Hunuse (tamarind) firewood costs around Rs 10,000 per tonne, while Niligiri (eucalyptus) sells for roughly Rs 9,000 per tonne. Kaad soudhe or honge wood (jungle wood), which emits heat of more intensity and yields sustained fire, is priced at about Rs 6,000 per tonne and widely used by commercial kitchens.

Sakib Ahmed, manager of Nisar Firewood Stall, said the demand rose dramatically in the past few days as hotels scramble for alternatives. "Demand went up because many hotels are unable to get LPG cylinders. We did not increase prices much because we understood the emergency. Depending on quality, jungle firewood cost can go up to Rs 15,000 per tonne, but we're trying to keep supplies steady," he said. Ahmed said workers are putting in extra hours to meet the surge in orders. "Our labourers are working harder now. Cutting, loading and transporting firewood takes time, but we are trying to supply as much as possible."

### More labour, monitoring

Several hotels in Majestic and Basaveshwaranagar have started using firewood stoves. Krishnakumar Rao, a hotel owner near Majestic, said: "Without LPG, we cannot cook for customers. Firewood is not ideal for every dish, but it is helping us keep the kitchen open." Mohammed Arif, owner of a hotel in Austin Town, said his kitchen temporarily switched to firewood stoves. "Biryani needs slow cooking and continuous heat. Normally we use LPG for consistency, but because cylinders are not available, we started using firewood. It gives a strong flame and helps maintain the dum process, so for now it ishelping us continue cooking," he said.

He added that while firewood works for large dishes like biryani and gravies, it requires more labour and constant monitoring. "With gas, cooking is easier to control. With firewood, someone has to keep feeding the stove and managing the flames. Our staff is working extra to manage the kitchen, but at least we can serve customers," he said.

## Food for patients: Hospitals activate contingency plans

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**Bengaluru**: Hospitals in the city are quietly putting emergency plans in place to ensure food supply for patients remains uninterrupted.

From stocking ready-to-eat items to exploring alternative fuel sources and centralised kitchens, both govt and private hospitals say they are preparing for potential disruptions, even though supplies are not yet affected.

At Victoria Hospital, the largest public healthcare facility in Bengaluru, authorities have begun stocking some essentials. "As of now, we have no shortage of gas cylinders, and the agency from which we procure has also assured us of no disruptions as we provide emergency and essential services. In case of a sudden disruption, we do not want our patients to be affected. So, we started stocking some items which do not require cooking, like bread, jam, milk and fruits. We are also procuring firewood as a precautionary measure," said Dr Kavya ST, director-cum-dean, Bangalore Medical College & Research Institute (BMCRI), to which Victoria Hospital is affiliated.

At Bowring Hospital, officials are exploring tie-ups with institutions that operate centralised kitchens. "We don't have a cylinder shortage yet. But since there is some uncertainty around the availability of cylinders, we're planning to speak to Iskcon, which supplies food to many govt hospitals, about supplying in-patient food here too, if need be," said Dr Manoj Kumar HV, director, Bowring Hospital.

While hospitals are focusing on ensuring food for in-patients, attendants and visitors who depend on private canteens on hospital premises remain worried. These canteens have also began cutting down menu options.

Photo for representaion

BURNING ISSUE

At Sparsh Group of Hospitals, the management said, "As part of internal efficiency measures, the in-house F&B team is rationalising certain menu options in staff cafeterias to optimise LPG usage while ensuring services continue smoothly. These steps are designed to minimise any potential impact on operations," said Sai Sagar V, cluster head — F&B, Sparsh Group of Hospitals.

Hospitals are also modifying patient diets to reduce cooking time while maintaining nutrition. "During such situations, the kitchen team and clinical dietitians adapt menus efficiently without compromising on nutrition. This includes preparing foods that cook faster such as non-millet porridge, sprouts, khichdi, yoghurt-based dishes, smoothies, nut pastes, boiled and sautéed lentils," said Manisha Kumar, chief operation officer, Karnataka, HCG Cancer Hospital.

"We also use electric cooking methods like induction cooktops and electric steamers for idli and boiled eggs so that we can replace an LPG-consuming dosa with a steamed idli and an omelette with boiled eggs. With these adjustments, meals remain balanced, high-protein and easy to digest for patients undergoing treatment," she added.

GAS PINCH: FROM 20 DISHES TO 15

# City's wedding menus slim down

Nithya Mandyam @timesofindia.com

**Bengaluru**: For generations, the lavish banana-leaf meal at Bengaluru weddings — with mouth-watering sweets, curries, palyas, rasam and sambar — was a defining ritual. But LPG shortage marred the elaborate feasting this wedding season, forcing caterers to shrink menus, alter traditional recipes and, in some cases, even decline new bookings as securing gas cylinders have become harder.

"We're suffering because of the shortage. Weddings are already booked and we have to supply food somehow," said MK Varadarajan of MK Varadarajan Brothers Caterers. "We prepare 18-20 items for a wedding meal. Now we reduced at least five items. We are reducing gravies in dishes like rasam and sambar and going for sweets that take less cooking time. The idea is to prepare items that can be cooked in one batch and use less gas. We are managing for now, but it is becoming difficult," he said.

S Manikandan, proprietor of Sri Lakshmi Caterers, said his team decided to cater only to those events that were already confirmed earlier. "Most marriage halls expect caterers to arrange their own gas cylinders. That is not possible right now. We are trying to manage with what we have," he said.

He added the crisis is affecting the preparation of traditional dishes. "Items like holige require time and steady cooking. With limited gas, we cannot prepare everything we usually do." Wedding catering costs in the city typically range between Rs 150 and Rs 300 per plate. Caterers said the LPG shortage is threatening their ability to maintain both quantity and quality.

There are no major changes in wedding bookings so far. Annath Kumar, committee member of Karnataka Marriage Halls Welfare Association, said: "If caterers want to use firewood cooking in certain cases, we are allowing that. We are trying to support them however possible."

Megha Srinivasan, whose cousin's wedding is scheduled to take place in Basavanagudi, said: "For our family wedding next week, the caterer told us the menu might be smaller than originally planned. They said the LPG shortage is affecting their kitchen. We understand the situation. The items on the menu have been brought down from 20 to 15."

With wedding season set to last a few more weeks, caterers said they are hoping the situation stabilises soon.

### DOSA, PURI OUT OF HOSTEL & PG PLATTER

Hostels and paying guest (PG) accommodations across the city have started altering their menus and turning to alternative cooking methods.

At RV College of Engineering, which houses 1,200 hostel students, authorities have removed several gas-intensive items from the menu.

"We informed students and parents about the change. Items that consume more energy, including chapati, dosa and puri, have been taken off the menu. We currently have sufficient gas after a delivery two days ago, but we are preparing for the coming days. We are sourcing firewood as a backup," said principal KN Subramanya.

BMS College of Engineering, where about 2,200 students stay in hostels, has begun using firewood as an alternative fuel. "We sourced firewood that should last 15 days. We also received 14 cylinders Thursday. While gas will be used judiciously for items like chapati and dosa, we will largely depend on firewood," said principal Bheemsha Arya.

The PG Accommodation Welfare Association has told inmates that only basic meals such as rice, dal or sambar, pickle and buttermilk will be served until gas supply normalises. Fried and gas-intensive items have been temporarily suspended. TNN

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# At 178 in 5 years, cybercrime convictions abysmally low

Pearl.DSouza@timesofindia.com

**Bengaluru**: Statistics released by home minister G Parameshwara in the legislative council Thursday show cybercrime is a booming business and digital deceit often goes unpunished as convictions in Karnataka remain extremely low — at a mere 0.2% over the past five years. Acquittals were higher — 402 (0.5%) to 178 convictions.

Financial recovery has also been limited. Police recovered Rs 626 crore of a staggering Rs 4,699 crore defrauded over the past two years, translating to a recovery rate of about 13%.

IN THE HOUSE

Speaking on the issue in the council, Parameshwara said cybercrime cases had initially risen sharply, but enforcement efforts are now yielding fruit. "We were the first to launch a cybercrime police station in the country, with the Infosys Foundation funding Rs 20 crore for the project that was initiated at CID headquarters," he said. "International experts who recently visited the facility lauded it as one of the best."

Parameshwara said cybercrime cases rose by 72% in 2023, reaching 22,255 cases. However, the number dropped to 14,899 in 2025 due to stronger enforcement measures.

But national data presents a different picture. Information from 'Crime in India' report by National Crime Records Bureau and cited in the Union home ministry's Lok Sabha reply in Dec 2025 showed that between 2019 and 2023 Karnataka filed only four chargesheets in cybercrime cases. During the same period, no trials were completed and there were zero convictions.

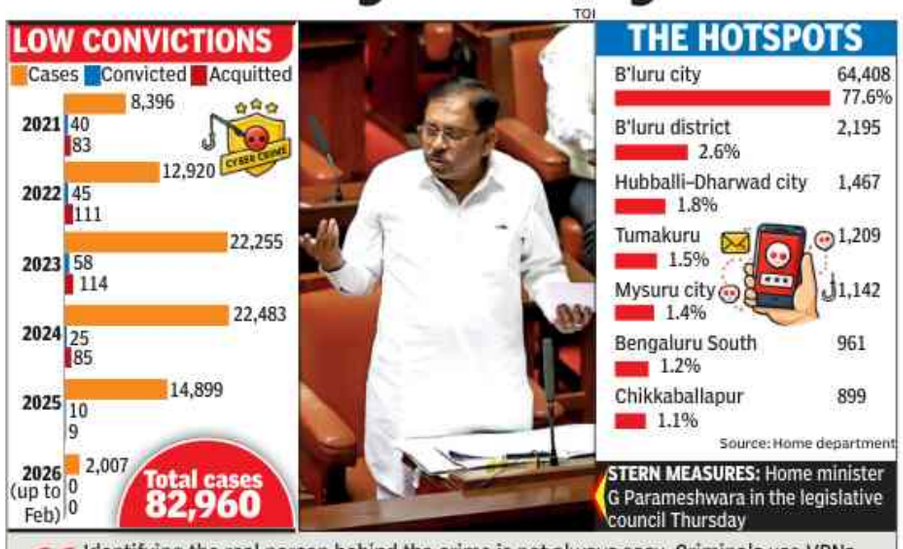
Reports from a neighbouring state suggest the low conviction rate may stem from challenges in collecting digital evidence, procedural delays and technical complexities during trial stages.

The issue also came into focus following a major 'digital arrest' fraud in Nov last year, where a senior executive of a Bengaluru company lost Rs 32 crore — the highest amount reported in this type of scam. "We arrested the perpetrator and are proceeding legally," Parameshwara said.

He said the usual modus operandi is for fraudsters to make a video call to a potential victim, claiming they are senior CBI or Enforcement Directorate officials. The setting resembles an office with agency logos in the background, and they threaten victims with arrest. Victims are often pressured to isolate themselves in their homes, while fraudsters force them to transfer money.

Parameshwara said police identified about 42,000 mule bank accounts used to route cyber fraud money and arrested nearly 500 people. Mule accounts are typically opened in the names of unsuspecting individuals or those willing to rent bank accounts for a commission. Fraudsters use these accounts to move cash from victims, usually across states.

Council member K Govindaraju pointed out that several vacancies remain, despite the creation of a cybersecurity vertical and upgrading of posts in the police department.




TOI

STERN MEASURES: Home minister G Parameshwara in the legislative council Thursday

> Identifying the real person behind the crime is not always easy. Criminals use VPNs, proxy servers, fake identities, mule bank accounts, and stolen devices to hide their tracks. Even if investigators trace a transaction or an IP address, proving in court that a specific individual was responsible is difficult. Sometimes victims delete messages, format phones, or close bank accounts after the incident, which destroys important evidence. Delayed reporting makes it harder for investigators to reconstruct what actually happened. Also, cases often involve multiple jurisdictions, victims, and complex financial trails through different payment systems or cryptocurrencies, making investigations slow and complicated
>
> **Ritesh Bhatia** | FOUNDER, V4WEB CYBERSECURITY

# Some Nandini milk samples had 0.2% adulteration: Min

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Bengaluru**: The govt Thursday said tests on milk sold under Karnataka Milk Federation's Nandini brand and Dodla, a private firm, were found to be adulterated and that stricter measures have been put in place to curb the practice.

Minor irrigation minister NS Boseraju told the council the govt has initiated steps to monitor quality through KMF's vigilance squad and police complaints would be filed in help from federation officials when adulteration is detected.

Boseraju, also leader of the House, was replying on behalf of chief minister Siddaramaiah to a question raised by Congress' Madhu G Madegowda.

"Adulteration is detected through test kits at primary milk units under district milk unions," Boseraju said. "Milk is also tested for adulteration at the dairy level and tests have shown producers sometimes mix urea, soda, salt, neutraliser, starch and sugar into their produce."

TOI

Raising the issue, Madegowda quoted animal husbandry minister K Venkatesh who had earlier told reporters that Nandini milk was found to have 16% adulteration and that authorities had detected 32% adulteration in milk from private firms such as Dodla.

Seeking to downplay the concern, Boseraju said the actual extent of adulteration was much lower. "The media might have quoted the mister out of context," he said. "There should not be such high levels of adulteration. Having said that, the govt is being vigilant and taking stern action against the culprits."

He said tests carried out across 16 district milk unions showed the overall adulteration level in Nandini milk was around 0.2%. The highest level — at nearly 0.5% — was detected in milk procured by the Hassan union.

Data placed in the House shows 15.1 lakh milk samples were tested between Jan 2025 and Jan 2026, of which 3,049 samples were found to be adulterated. However, Boseraju did not specify the extent of adulteration detected in Dodla milk. Animal husbandry minister Venkatesh was also not present.

Elaborating on the legal provisions, Boseraju said those found guilty of adulteration face a minimum jail term of three months, which can extend up to life imprisonment under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006. He said no cases have been registered so far.

## Panel begins work on ensuring responsible AI

**Bengaluru**: A committee constituted to frame a comprehensive policy on the safe, ethical and transparent adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) across govt systems and public services met for the first time Thursday and discussed the rapidly evolving AI landscape.

Chaired by Infosys co-founder **Kris Gopalakrishnan**, the panel discussed the need for strong governance frameworks to ensure responsible use of AI technologies, especially in systems that affect citizens. Officials said the committee will submit an interim report in 60 days and final recommendations within 90 days.

Co-chaired by N Manjula, secretary, department of electronics, IT, biotechnology and science and technology, the panel comprises experts from industry, academia, policy and law. IT minister Priyank Kharge said the initiative will help the state balance rapid technological progress with public interest. "The committee will help shape a governance framework that promotes innovation while safeguarding transparency, accountability and citizen trust," he said.

Gopalakrishnan said: "If we can leverage this opportunity effectively, Karnataka can become the first state to develop a comprehensive framework for responsible AI, one that creates jobs of the 21st century." TNN

## SHORT TAKES

### Early health intervention centres in all districts

Health minister Dinesh Gundu Rao said the govt will establish district early intervention centres (DEICs) in all districts by next year. Replying to a question in the assembly, Rao said the govt has already opened DEICs in 17 districts under Rashtriya Bal Swasthya Karyakram (RBSK), and they play a crucial role in providing early diagnosis and treatment for disabled children and those with developmental disorders. He said the state has submitted proposals to the Centre seeking necessary equipment and human resources under the National Health Mission (NHM) for 2026-27 to strengthen the functioning of these centres.

### Raise LPG shortage issue in Parliament, says DKS

Deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar urged BJP MPs to raise the issue of LPG shortage in Parliament and ensure relief to people. "MPs speak on all kinds of issues. They should raise the issue of LPG shortage too," Shivakumar said. Meanwhile, BJP state president BY Vijayendra criticised Congress protests over LPG and petrol price rise, calling the increase marginal. He said prices were higher during the UPA era.

### Udupi to get medical college on PPP model

Medical education minister Sharanprakash Patil told the assembly that the govt plans to establish a new medical college in Udupi district under the PPP model. Replying to a question from Yashpal A Suvarna, Udupi MLA, Patil said the govt aims to have at least one medical college. "We have medical colleges in 22 districts," he said. "Work on constructing medical colleges in Bagalkot, Kanakapura and Magadi, which were announced last year, has begun. Efforts are on to set up colleges in Bijapur and Kolar," he said.

### No hospital for Hutti Gold Mines workers

Manappa D Vajjal, who represents Lingasugur in the assembly, raised concerns over the absence of emergency medical facilities for workers at Hutti Gold Mines in Raichur district. He said some 6,000 workers operate underground, but there is no hospital within a 100km radius, forcing patients to travel long distances during emergencies. He alleged that delays in treatment had led to deaths and cited a recent heart attack incident involving a Valmiki seer at the mines. Medical education minister Sharanprakash Patil said the govt would examine the issue, while speaker UT Khader directed officials to arrange high-end ambulances at the site.

### BJP flags KPSC exam irregularities

Opposition BJP member Thursday raised concerns in the assembly over alleged irregularities in KPSC recruitment exams and demanded reforms to restore credibility. Initiating the debate, V Sunil Kumar said recent KPSC exam results had "created anxiety" among aspirants. He alleged controversies had eroded public trust and cited complaints over suspicious patterns in results and handling of answer sheets in exams conducted for 384 posts. Kumar demanded postponement of interviews scheduled for March 23 until an investigation is completed.

# *All crest gates of TB dam to be replaced by May: DKS*

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Bengaluru**: Deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar Thursday said work on replacing crest gates at Tungabhadra dam is progressing on priority, and is expected to be completed by May.

Replying after TA Sharavana of JD(S) raised the issue in the legislative council, Shivakumar, who holds the water resources portfolio, said the work is being "handled with urgency". He said the issue is "serious" and members who have doubts can visit the dam and take stock of the situation for themselves.

Referring to an earlier incident where a crest gate was damaged and washed away, he said the structure "appeared to shake", but the damage was repaired within seven days.

Shivakumar also referred to criticism made at the time by Gali Janardhan Reddy, BJP MLA, and said the govt later conducted a study of dams across the state before deciding to replace ageing gates. As part of the first phase, the Tungabhadra dam gates are being replaced.

TOI

SAFETY MOVE: The decision to replace all gates was taken after one gate was washed away

As of March 10, Shivakumar said 14 gates were replaced. Experts say it takes about seven days to install one crest gate. However, multiple installations are being carried out simultaneously to meet the deadline.

He said the govt signed an agreement on April 24 last year, with Ahmedabad-based Hardware Tool and Machinery Projects to remove the 19th stop-log gate — the one that was washed away — and install a spillway gate.

Another contract was signed with the same firm on June 10, to replace the other 32 gates with spillway gates at a cost of Rs 34.5 crore within 15 months.

Fabrication work for 25 gates has been completed, while work on two gates is under way. A total of 26 gates have been removed and two more are in the process of being removed. So far, 14 gates have been installed and work on installing three more is under way.

On the proposed Navali balancing reservoir project, Shivakumar said Andhra Pradesh was yet to agree to discuss it. He said the project involves three states, and a decision cannot be taken by Karnataka alone.

### Centre ignoring North Karnataka airports, says MB Patil

Industries minister MB Patil criticised the Centre decision to upgrade Madurai airport in Tamil Nadu as an international airport, alleging Karnataka's long-pending demand for similar status for airports in Hubballi and Belagavi were ignored. Patil said the move appears to have been taken with upcoming elections in Tamil Nadu in mind. "The Centre's indifferent attitude towards the demands of our state is questionable," he said. Patil said a letter was sent to Union civil aviation minister K Ram Mohan Naidu in June last year, requesting upgradation of the two airports. He urged the Union govt to declare at least one of the airports as an international airport.

MAKING A MARK: Congress' Nayana Motamma speaks in the legislative assembly on Thursday

# Allowed safari only after safety checks: Min

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Bengaluru**: Forest minister Eshwar Khandre said the safari at Bandipur Tiger Reserve was allowed to resume only after safety regulations recommended by an expert panel were implemented.

**BANDIPUR**

Responding to questions from BJP members in the assembly, Khandre said the suspension of safari operations in Nov last year came in the wake of a series of tiger attacks. He said the loss due to the suspension amounted to Rs 6-8 crore.

"Livelihoods were lost, but our focus was on saving lives," Khandre said. "In Nov and Dec, human-animal conflict increased. Tigers killed three people in 15 days, while one person was permanently disabled. When I visited Chamarajanagar, locals and organisations, including farmers, submitted memoranda alleging safari vehicles were operating even at night. They demanded a halt to safaris."

Khandre said the issue was discussed at a wildlife board meeting chaired by the CM, following which an expert committee was formed. The panel included a representative from the central wildlife institute. He said the safari was restarted based on the committee's interim report.

He said about 100km of Bandipur's 314km periphery is a high-conflict zone. "In that region, we have 25 anti-poaching camps, round-the-clock patrols, an integrated command centre, and drone surveillance," he said.

TOI

ENDANGERED

Khandre said rising wildlife numbers and shrinking forest cover were contributing to human-animal conflict. "In 1972, Bandipur had 12 tigers. Now there are 175 but forest cover has not increased proportionately. We have formed an expert team to study carrying capacity."

The govt has also launched an outreach programme in 70 villages around Bandipur, with 35% of safari revenue to be used for local development.

To another question, Khandre admitted elephant attacks have also been rising. "The elephant population has increased, and corridors have been fragmented due to development work," he said. He said the govt is erecting 116km of railway barricades at a cost of Rs 201 crore. Khandre also accepted a request to allow trekking at Kumara Parvatha from 5.30am instead of 6am.

# Train travel set to get safer as SWR fast-tracks Kavach cover

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**Bengaluru**: As demand increases for safety enhancements, South Western Railway (SWR) is set to bring 42% of its 3,721 route km (R-km) network under Kavach – an indigenous automatic train protection system – by March next year.

Developed by Research Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO) in 2020, the system is designed to meet international safety standards and prevent accidents.

Kavach is mandatory to operate trains above the speed of 140 kmph.

It operates through continuous real-time communication between trackside systems and locomotives using ultra high frequency (UHF) radio antennae and track-mounted radio frequency identification (RFID) tags. Using this information, along with train position, speed, and track profile, the wayside system calculates the movement authority, the safe distance a train is permitted to travel, and transmits it to the onboard Kavach unit. The onboard system monitors train speed, displays critical information to the loco pilot, and generates braking curves for different operating conditions.

If the train approaches a danger signal, exceeds the permitted speed, or enters a conflicting route, Kavach automatically applies brakes, preventing signal passing at danger (SPAD) and potential collisions. If two trains are detected moving towards each other, the system issues an automatic stop-on-sight command to both. Currently, it is implemented only on 2,200 route kilometres of India's railway network.

WHERE IT STANDS NOW
3,721 route km Total SWR network
0 route km Kavach operational
1,568 route km Integration work in progress
Source: SWR

TOI

PROTECTION SYSTEM: Kavach operates through continuous real-time communication between trackside systems and locomotives

As of March 1, 2026, works are progressing in various sections of Karnataka to connect a total of 1,568 route km of network to the Kavach system. In this first phase of the project implementation, major busy places in the state like Mysuru, Hubballi, Arsikere and Ballari, along with Bengaluru, will be covered.

The tender for the 778 route km of tracks within Bengaluru and Mysuru divisions was awarded in May last year. For the remaining 790 route km connecting Hubballi and Mysuru divisions, the process was completed in June 2025. Both stretches will become Kavach-equipped by 31 March 2027, according to SWR.

During the second phase of the project, an additional 456 route km will be covered within Bengaluru division alone. Shantigrama–Chikkabanavara, Yelahanka–Chikkaballapura–Bangarapet, Baiyyappanahalli–Vimanpura (this is a specialised line serving HAL airport area), Yeshwantpur–Yelahanka, the bypass line at Yeswantpur, and Byappanahalli–Banaswadi sections will be part of the future expansion, for which the tender is yet to be issued by SWR.

The package will include neighbouring regions in other states. Another 806 route km in Mysuru division and 862 route km in Hubballi division are also on the cards.

"We are confident of achieving the tentative deadlines. For the second phase, tenders could be rolled out very soon this year itself, as this is a priority for the railways," SWR's chief PRO Manjunath Kanamadi told **TOI**.

## Warder held for smuggling drugs into jail

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Bengaluru:** City police arrested a warder attached to the central prison on charges of attempting to smuggle 15 grams of methamphetamine and a cannabis smoking pipe hidden in his undergarments.

Prakash Gavade, now remanded in judicial custody in the same prison, is the third warder to be arrested in six months for allegedly attempting to smuggle drugs into the jail.

# Crisis forcing rethink on cooking methods

▸ Continued from page 1

We are installing electric grillers and induction plates to optimise LPG usage," Tolani added.

Bengaluru is home to 80-plus microbreweries, mostly patronised by the city's young crowd. Prasanna Kumar, co-founder of Bengaluru Brewing Company, said their beer stock may only last another 15 days if the supply situation does not improve.

"Gas is the primary fuel for running the boiler during the brewing process," he said. "The gas boiler generates steam and heat required to process the malt. Switching to firewood or electric boilers on short notice is expensive and time-consuming. Moreover, it can affect the purity and flavour of the beer," he said.

AI

Menu changes are also becoming inevitable. Nirmal PV, co-founder of Mannheim Craft Brewery, said LPG shortage has forced his team to rethink cooking practices. "We are modifying our menu and focusing on dishes that require less heat. Some cuisines, such as Asian, Chinese, and Italian require high heat. So, we are shifting towards simpler cooking methods."

Anirudha Kheny, managing partner at Keen Mustard Ventures, said the uncertainty around gas supplies is creating anxiety among restaurant and pub owners. "Pubs and restaurants already face restrictions on the number of cylinders they can store, and the current situation can further tighten those limits."

He added that menu changes may also impact customer preferences. "Weekend crowds could be affected because some of the favourite dishes may no longer be available."

Vinay Chandrashekar, founder of Long Boat Brewing Co, said the pub is removing some of the deep-fried items and using electric equipment for cooking.

# *BU panel: Revise college hours to help pupils earn*

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**Bengaluru:** The Institutional Development Plan (IDP) of Bangalore University proposes expanding online academic programmes and revising college hours as part of its roadmap for the coming years.

The University Grants Commission-mandated IDP, prepared by a team led by senior professor Ashok Hanjagi, recommended rescheduling academic working hours to allow students to attend classes in the morning. This, it believes, will enable them to pursue part-time work, prepare for competitive examinations, or enrol in additional courses alongside their primary degree.

The university also needs to align undergraduate, postgraduate and PhD admissions with national and state academic calendars.

It should consider making the admission process more flexible and year-round to improve student diversity and increase enrolment, the document suggests.

"We do not want to restrict students to the four walls of classrooms. They should have time to pursue part-time jobs or do another degree or a skill-based course. We also suggested that there should be a strong learning management system by which students can attend classes online, too, in case they are unable to attend them physically," explained Prof Ashok.

IDP also suggested building a directorate for online programmes and increasing the number of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered in online mode. This will widen access to higher education and improve the revenue streams for the university.

IDP recommended that BU should target working professionals and students who require flexible learning options.

EMPHASIS ON TECHNOLOGY
Recommendations in institutional development plan
• Strengthen teaching and learning systems through use of digital technologies
• Upgrade classrooms and laboratories with smart technologies
• Implement centralised learning management system
• Build alumni network to generate revenue
• Set up research grants through collaborative programmes with leading institutions in emerging research areas
• Rent out university auditoriums, seminar halls and guesthouses
• Raise funds through patent commercialisation and consultancy

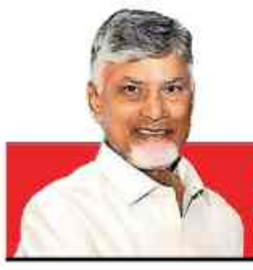
"The directorate of online programmes will offer courses online, which will enable departments to generate revenue while enhancing the institution's global academic profile," he added.

Among the challenges the university faced, the document points to financial constraints, including inadequate govt grants and limited success in securing international research funding. To bridge these gaps, the university should expand collaborations with the private sector, attract CSR funding, and participate in global academic networks such as Erasmus+ and Fulbright programmes, it says.

Dedicated career services and placement cells, as well as innovation hubs and start-up incubators, are also proposed to promote entrepreneurship among students.

# TIMES NATION

THE TIMES OF INDIA, BENGALURU | FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2026

ANDHRA CM CHANDRABABU NAIDU ASKS COLLECTORS TO STEP UP EFFORTS TO ATTRACT INVESTMENTS

'NO ALLIANCE TALKS HELD WITH TVK': AIADMK GENERAL SECRETARY EDAPPADI PALANISWAMI AHEAD OF TN POLLS

**HACK OF THE DAY** **TRACK AND LIMIT ANDROID DATA HOGS**

**WHAT IT SOLVES:** Data exhaustion, surprise bills, and battery drain.

**WHAT TO DO:** Identify and restrict high-usage apps by enabling "Data Saver" in settings for a quick, system-wide background data block.

**STEPS:**

1. Open Settings and tap Network & internet (or Data usage).
2. Select App data usage to see a list sorted by consumption.
3. Choose a date range to analyze specific periods.
4. Tap a high-usage app and toggle off Background data to stop it from syncing when not in use.
5. Set a Data warning or Data limit to receive alerts or automate data shut-offs.

**CAREFUL: Restricting background data may delay notifications for apps like WhatsApp or Gmail.**

*Hacks are based on verified public sources. Readers are advised to follow official websites & updated rules*

Tip from **neha.saini1**@timesinternet

Scan for more hacks

## 9-yr-old falls from school bus, crushed

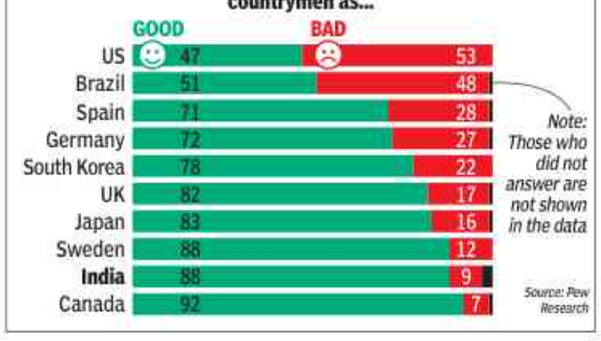
A 9-year-old girl died after a school bus jolted while crossing a speed breaker, causing her to fall from the vehicle and get crushed under its rear wheel in Agra Wednesday, reports **Mohammad Dilshad**. Police have initiated action against the driver and school authorities. Naina, a Class I student of RBS School, was returning home with her sister, Pari, a Class V student of the same school. Naina's family alleged the bus was in poor condition and students were made to sit on wooden planks. Her grandfather Devendra Singh said the driver first dropped other students, parked the bus at school & then took her to hospital on bike.

**STATOISTICS** A slice of life in numbers

## When people rate morality and ethics of their country

In the 2025 Global Attitudes Survey, perceptions of fellow citizens' morality varied widely. A majority in the US thought poorly of their countrymen, while Canada, India and Sweden reported overwhelmingly positive assessments

**Share (%) of people who rate morality & ethics of fellow countrymen as...**




# Govt: Hormuz safe passage for ships discussed with Iran

## But Doesn't Say If Tehran Offered Any Assurance On India-Bound Vessels

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Govt said on Thursday that external affairs minister S Jaishankar had discussed safe passage for commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz in a conversation with his Iranian counterpart Seyed Araghchi on Tuesday but did not confirm if there's any assurance yet from Tehran that India-bound vessels would not be targeted.

According to official sources, govt officials remain engaged with their Iranian counterparts to negotiate safe passage for around 28 Indian ships that are stuck in the Persian Gulf. India had on Wednesday deplored attacks on cargo ships after an India-bound Thai ship was hit by an Iranian projectile.

Ministry of external affairs recalled that the ministers had spoken thrice about the conflict. "In the last conversation issues pertaining to safety of shipping and India's energy security were discussed. Beyond that, it would be premature to say anything," said spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal.

The official was responding to a question about whether Iran was allowing Indian ships to safely sail through the Strait. In his talks with Jaishankar, according to an Iranian readout, Araghchi had said the "insecure situation" and problems arising for shipping in the Persian Gulf are a result of "the aggressive and destabilising actions of the US, and the international community must hold the US accountable for this situation". He also called for condemnation of the US and Israeli actions.

Liberia-flagged tanker Shenlong Suezmax, carrying crude oil from Saudi Arabia, that arrived clearing Strait of Hormuz, at Mumbai Port, Thursday

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said on Wednesday it would not allow even a litre of oil to be transported through the Strait. "You will not be able to artificially lower the price of oil. Expect oil at $200 per barrel. The price of oil depends on regional security, and you are the main source of insecurity in the region," said a spokesperson for IRGC.

India had said on Wednesday that 28 Indian vessels with 778 seafarers onboard were stuck in the Persian Gulf.

Of these, 24 vessels with 677 seafarers are on the western part of the Strait of Hormuz, while four vessels with 101 persons are on the eastern side, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, special secretary in ministry of ports, shipping and waterways had said in a media briefing.

## 'No confirmation of Indian-piloted ship going dark on way to Mumbai'

▸ Continued from page 1

A source in DG shipping told **TOI**, "Captain is an Indian. Not all the crew on board Shenlong Suezmax are Indians. The ship has a mixed crew of Indians, Filipinos and Pakistan nationals."

Though there is no official confirmation that the Indian captain activated the "dark mode" and navigated the ship towards Mumbai from the "blocked" Strait of Hormuz by switching off automatic identification system tracking (a radio-based system used by the maritime industry to monitor and track vessel movements in real time), the source told **TOI**, "GPS signals are pretty erratic in the Strait. In a war-like situation, the AIS tracking system is switched off."

The source also informed that "another ship (from the Gulf) is also on its way to Mumbai". As per some reports, the second oil vessel may dock in Mumbai on Saturday. Earlier, the commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps' (IRGC) Naval Force said that vessels seeking to sail through the strategically critical Strait of Hormuz must obtain Iran's approval; otherwise, they could become targets of Iranian attacks. Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri said that two ships that had ignored Iran's warnings were targeted in the Strait on Wednesday.

"Were the ships assured of safe passage through the Strait of Hormuz? This should be asked of the crews of the vessels Express Rome and Mayuree Naree, who today, trusting in empty promises, ignored the warnings and intended to cross the Strait, but were caught. Any vessel intending to pass must obtain permission from Iran," the Iranian general said in a post on X.

According to Iranian state media, Iran intensified its restrictions on the passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz and Tehran has said that vessels not serving the interests of the US and Israel can sail through the Strait safely.

## Exporters divert Dubai consignments

**Nagpur:** Ships from Mumbai's JNPT hauling food consignments to the UAE will take a new 'safer' route to anchor at Khor Fakkan, a small port on the east of the emirates, to escape Iranian attacks on Dubai's Jebel Ali Port, the usual destination for Indian vessels, but at a 10-time higher freight charges, **reports Shishir Arya.**

Ships already on sail would also be ending their voyage at Khor Fakkan, a source said. In the normal course, it costs $250 for a large container from Mumbai to reach Jebel Ali Port. Now, the freight has soared to $2,500, said Shivkumar Rao of M/s R&Y Logistics.

# Distributors: LPG booking system not built for heavy traffic

▸ Continued from page 1

Many others who had already placed orders said they were receiving cancellation alerts. Women accompanied by young children, elderly residents clutching empty cylinders and office-goers who had taken time off work were seen standing in long queues for hours outside LPG outlets in Delhi, Gurgaon, Mumbai, Kolkata, Lucknow, Chennai and many other cities.

In Mumbai, dealers reported a more than 100% surge in daily bookings as anxious consumers rushed to secure supplies. Subham Pradhan, a Gurgaon resident, said he had made 50 attempts in the last two days to book a refill without success, while Gagan Chaudhary said he had booked a cylinder before the crisis, only to first face delays and then receive a cancellation alert on Thursday. Kolkata resident Soumyakanti Chakraborty said he had booked a cylinder about 15 days ago but still did not receive it.

Shashi Kant Sharma, vice-president of the Federation of LPG Distributors of India, said the system was not built to handle such heavy traffic. "Bookings have risen tenfold, so the system has slowed and people are facing problems. We are working on it at the backend," he said.

Nagpur bench of Bombay high court on Thursday sought responses from Centre, Directorate General of Foreign Trade and Confidence Petroleum India Ltd on a petition filed by six LPG distributors, who contended that continued LPG export amid a shortage in the country runs contrary to govt's March 9 direction imposing restrictions on export of essential commodities and mandating prioritisation of household supply.

In an interim direction, the court instructed respondents, particularly Confidence Petroleum, to ensure that "storage and supply of LPG for domestic consumption shall be in accordance with the prevailing policy" of Union govt.

The crisis has prompted more employers, after Infosys, to sound an alert to employees. Cognizant has encouraged employees to adopt BYOF (Bring Your Own Food), wherever feasible.

## Indian mission: Offering help to rescued Indian sailors

▸ Continued from page 1

The mission also noted that the "embassy of India Baghdad is in regular contact with Iraqi authorities and rescued Indian sailors and is offering all possible assistance". Safesea Vishnu was chartered by an Iraqi company contracted with State Organisation for Marketing of Oil, Zefyros was loaded with condensate products from Basra Gas Company and was in a ship-to-ship loading area in Iraqi waters.

The incident occurred at Iraq's Umm Qasar anchorage during a fuel cargo transfer with Safesea Vishnu tanker late Wednesday, Benetech Shipping SA said. All 23 crew members of another tanker, Zefyros, are safe and accounted for, authorities said.

Farhan al-Fartousi, director general of state-owned General Company for Ports of Iraq, confirmed to Iraqi News Agency that "the operation of oil ports has been suspended", though commercial ports continue to function.

## Birla back in his chair, stresses rules are same for everyone

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** A day after the vote of no-confidence against him was rejected, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla resumed his duty and asserted that he would stick to rules and would not allow special treatment to any member, including the leader of opposition.

"Some members believe that LoP may stand at any time and speak on any subject of their choice as their special privilege. I wish to clarify that the House functions as per rules framed by the House itself. These rules apply equally to every member," said a confident Birla as he repudiated the charge — the principal justification of the Congress-led move to bring a motion against him — that he did not let Rahul Gandhi speak.

He also rejected the charge that he has been unfair to opposition and switches off microphones when they are speaking. "I would like to clarify once again that the Chair does not have any button to switch microphones on or off. The system in the Houses activates the microphone only of the member who has been granted permission to speak," he said.

# India co-sponsors GCC-led UNSC resolution against Iran

TNN & AGENCIES

**New Delhi:** India co-sponsored a resolution in the UN Security Council that condemned the "egregious" attacks by Iran against Gulf Cooperation Council countries and Jordan and demanded immediate cessation of all attacks by Tehran while denouncing its threats of closure of the Strait of Hormuz.

The 15-nation Security Council, currently under the presidency of the United States, adopted the resolution on Wednesday with 13 votes in favour, none against and abstentions by veto-wielding permanent members China and Russia. MEA said India had co-sponsored the GCC-led resolution at the Security Council as it reflected India's position on the issue.

"We have 135 countries who have co-sponsored this particular resolution. The resolution reflects several of our positions. As you know, we have a large diaspora in the GCC countries and their well-being and welfare is of utmost importance," spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, adding that the Gulf was also very important for India's energy security needs.

Without naming Iran, PM Narendra Modi had earlier condemned attacks on all GCC countries. India co-sponsored the Bahrain-led resolution along with over 130 nations, including Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Canada, Egypt, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, Ukraine, UAE, UK, US, Yemen and Zambia.

The resolution, which had a total of 135 co-sponsors, reiterated its strong support for the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan.

It condemned in the "strongest terms the egregious attacks" by Iran against the territories of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan and determined that such acts constituted a breach of international law and were a serious threat to international peace and security. The resolution demanded immediate cessation of all attacks by Iran against the GCC countries and Jordan and that Tehran "immediately and unconditionally" cease from any provocation or threats to neighbouring states, including the use of proxies.

### There was no delay by India in expressing Khamenei death condolences, says MEA

Govt Thursday denied there was any delay on India's part in expressing condolences over the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. Asking people to avoid "ill-informed" comments on the issue, the MEA said that foreign secretary Vikram Misri signed the book of condolence at the Iranian embassy the day it was opened.

"As you are aware, foreign secretary signed the condolence book at the Iranian embassy on behalf of the Government of India. He did so on 5th March itself, which was the first day of the opening of the book," said spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal.

"It would do well for commentators to first update themselves on important matters before they choose to speak in public. Such ill-informed comments are best avoided," added the official.

Khamenei had been killed on the very first day of the ongoing war - February 28. The MEA's response came days after former NSA Shivshankar Menon said that he found India's silence on the issue inexplicable. "I mean not to have anything to say when a head of state of a state you recognise and in your neighbourhood is assassinated by another country," said Menon. TNN


HEALTH AWARENESS INITIATIVE

## Lord's Mark's Historic Collaboration with CMET to Develop World's First AI-Based Radiation-free Breast Cancer Detection Device

In India, awareness about women's intimate hygiene is still limited. While women in larger cities have better access to information and healthcare, many women in tier-2 towns and rural areas rarely discuss or actively practise vaginal hygiene. Social hesitation and lack of education mean that many women grow up without clear guidance on how to care for their intimate health. This matters because poor genital hygiene and untreated infections can increase the risk of cervical infections, some of which are linked to cervical cancer.

Lord's Mark Industries Limited has entered into a Technology Transfer Agreement with the Centre for Materials for Electronic Technology (CMET) to manufacture an AI-powered, radiation-free Breast Screening Wearable Device for early detection of breast cancer.

India ranks third globally in new breast cancer incidence after China and the US, with the disease accounting for over 26 per cent of all female cancers in the country. The global breast cancer market was valued at USD 4,882.14 million in 2024 and is projected to reach USD 12,880.85 million by 2035 at a CAGR of 9.22 per cent (MRFR). Grand View Research highlights diagnostics as the dominant segment driven by early detection demand, while Future Market Insights estimates the screening and diagnostics market at USD 5.05–5.86 billion in 2025, expected to reach USD 10.5–11.36 billion by 2033–2035.

The wearable integrates high-precision thermal sensors with AI-driven temperature mapping to identify early-stage abnormalities in a non-invasive, radiation-free manner. The partnership combines CMET's R&D expertise with Lord's Mark's manufacturing scale and distribution strength, accelerating indigenous med-tech innovation.

**KEY FEATURES AND ADVANTAGES:**

- **Convenient and infrastructure-light:** Usable in comfortable settings with minimal setup across hospitals, clinics, community centres and homes.
- **Non-radiative and painless:** Eliminates radiation exposure and discomfort, improving screening compliance.
- **Advanced thermal sensors:** High-precision temperature mapping powered by AI-driven analytics for real-time insights.
- **Privacy-first design:** Discreetly wearable under clothing, ensuring dignity and user comfort.
- **Early abnormality detection:** Identifies early-stage thermal irregularities to support timely medical evaluation.
- **Portable and scalable:** Lightweight, mobile solution enabling deployment across urban and underserved regions alike.

The device represents a significant advancement over traditional mammography by eliminating radiation exposure and discomfort, expanding access beyond hospital settings, and delivering reliable AI-driven detection insights.

With this initiative, Lord's Mark reinforces its long-term commitment to advancing accessible, AI-led healthcare solutions—positioning itself at the forefront of scalable preventive diagnostics in India.

Sachidanand Upadhyay, Managing Director, Lord's Mark Industries Limited, commenting on the partnership with CMET, said: "This collaboration marks a defining step in our journey to build globally competitive, indigenous healthcare technologies. By integrating CMET's scientific expertise with Lord's Mark's manufacturing strength, we are enabling a new paradigm in preventive diagnostics—non-invasive, AI-driven, and truly accessible. Our vision is to reduce barriers to early detection and empower women across India with safer, smarter screening solutions. This is not just a product initiative; it is a commitment to scalable, impact-led healthcare innovation."

With this initiative, Lord's Mark reinforces its long-term commitment to technology-led healthcare manufacturing focused on intelligent, inclusive and impact-driven solutions that make early detection safer, simpler and more accessible nationwide. With this, Lord's Mark Industries Limited looks to commercialise this product for mass breast cancer screening across India and globally. With its growing network worldwide, Lord's Mark ensures that this product is taken as a gift from India to the world, aiming for India to be the only country in the world to have this technology.

Lord's Mark Industries Limited would ensure that the screening cost is made so affordable that every woman in India and abroad will voluntarily get tested. This will create awareness and help ensure that breast cancer is curable through early detection. The product will be available for commercial use across the globe by the end of this year.

**For more information, visit:** http://lordsmark.com

*Disclaimer: Issued in public interest for patient awareness by Lord's Mark. The information presented is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for professional medical advice. The views expressed are independent opinions of experts. Please consult your physician for diagnosis or treatment.*


# PM: Govt sparing no effort to minimise war fallout on citizens, oppn is spreading fear

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Amid concerns over the impact of Iran war on India's energy supply, PM Narendra Modi said on Thursday his govt is sparing no effort to minimise its fallout on citizens and accused opposition parties of fear-mongering to push their agenda at the of cost national interest.

He said no country is untouched by this global crisis and India is trying at different levels to deal with it, including making efforts to get around the supply chain disruption. He has spoken to global leaders, he said at NXT summit.

On a day leader of the opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, targeted govt over "LPG crisis" in the House, Modi hit back without naming anyone and said everyone, including political parties, have a role in ensuring that the country successfully handles the crisis.

"Some people are trying to spread panic. They want to push their agenda. I do not want to give any political reaction now but will say that they are exposing themselves before people and inflicting a great harm on the country," he said. India will definitely be able to deal with the challenges arising out of the war, he said. He listed out a host of measures his govt has taken since 2014 to build India's alternative energy sources, reduce its dependence on oil, multiply its petroleum storage capacity, while ensuring more people benefit from them. India used to have negligible storage capacity to deal with any crisis but it now stands at 50 lakh tonne, while it has become one of the biggest refining hubs in the world. People's aspirations have risen and his govt welcomes them, he added before turning to his critics.

"Many of my 'well-wishers' are nursing the hope that I will be crushed under the burden of expectations... their intentions are dishonest, and their hopes will never be fulfilled," he said, adding he has people's blessings. He asked states to take stringent action against rumour-mongers and black-marketers.

# When med care fails: What SC's passive euthanasia ruling means

Anuja.Jaiswal@timesofindia.com

In a landmark ruling that revisits one of medicine's most difficult ethical questions, the Supreme Court on Wednesday allowed the withdrawal of artificial life support — or passive euthanasia as it is commonly referred to — for a 31-year-old man who had been comatose for over 13 years. The decision in the Harish Rana case marks the first time the court has directly permitted passive euthanasia for a patient in a permanent vegetative state.

**Dr Sushma Bhatnagar**, former chief of AIIMS and professor of onco-anaesthesia and palliative medicine, tells **TOI** what this mean in medical practice, and how doctors decide when life support should be withdrawn.

**What does passive euthanasia mean in medical practice?**

In simple terms, it involves withdrawal of life support, stopping certain forms of artificial support that prolong life without improving the patient's condition. For instance, doctors may stop artificial feeding, fluids, or other life-sustaining interventions when they are no longer beneficial. The aim is not to actively end life, but to stop treatments that only prolong suffering, and allow the illness to run its course when recovery is not possible.

**In what situations do doctors consider withdrawing life support?**

Doctors consider it when treatments are no longer helping the patient and are only increasing suffering. In such cases, continuing aggressive medical support may not be in the patient's best interest. Situations may include a permanent vegetative state, severe and irreversible brain injury, terminal cancer, end-stage kidney failure where dialysis is no longer effective, or advanced heart disease where treatment options have been exhausted. It may involve withdrawing ventilatory support, stopping medicines that artificially maintain blood pressure, dialysis, artificial feeding through tubes, or other interventions that sustain bodily functions without improving the patient's condition.

**How do doctors determine that a patient has no chance of recovery, and what safeguards must be followed before life support can be withdrawn in India?**

There are established medical criteria and tests. For instance, specific tools are used to confirm conditions such as coma or a vegetative state. In terminal illnesses like advanced cancer, prognosis and chances of recovery are assessed using evidence-based medical guidelines. In India, decisions typically involve a review by a primary and a secondary medical board before any decision is taken. In some cases, hospital ethics committees may also be involved to ensure that the process adheres to medical ethics and legal guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court. These measures ensure that the decision is medically justified and ethically sound.

**How important are living wills or advance directives?**

They are extremely important. If a patient has clearly stated in advance what kind of treatment they would or would not want in such circumstances, doctors and families can follow those wishes. Respecting patient autonomy is a fundamental principle of medical ethics.

**How often do doctors get requests to withdraw life support in India?**

It is still relatively rare in India. Awareness about advance directives is limited. Culturally, many families find it difficult to accept death as a natural part of life.

**What is the difference between active and passive euthanasia, and how is the latter different from assisted suicide or assisted dying?**

Active euthanasia involves deliberately administering drugs to cause death. Passive euthanasia refers to withdrawing or withholding treatments that artificially sustain life and involves stopping medical interventions that are no longer beneficial. Assisted suicide involves actively helping a person end their life, usually by providing medication that the person takes themselves.

**What are some common misconceptions about passive euthanasia?**

Many people believe it means doctors are actively trying to end a patient's life. In reality, it usually involves stopping medical interventions that are no longer useful, and focusing on comfort, care and dignity at the end of life.

**From a medical ethics perspective, why are these practices treated differently?**

Medical ethics emphasises not causing harm and avoiding treatments that offer no benefit. When treatment only prolongs suffering without any realistic chance of recovery, withdrawing it can be considered ethically appropriate.

TOI Explains

Harish Rana (also inset) with his mother Nirmala Devi in a 2024 photo. Harish suffered 100% disability after falling from the fourth floor in 2013

## INDIA'S STAND ON THE END-OF-LIFE QUESTION

**2011** | SC rejects euthanasia for **Aruna Shanbaug** — in a vegetative state since 1973, after a brutal assault — but allows passive euthanasia under strict safeguards, giving the concept its first legal recognition in India

**2015** | Shanbaug dies after 42 years, spending four decades in a vegetative state

**2018** | In Common Cause vs Union of India, SC rules that the right to die with dignity is part of Article 21 (right to life) and permits living wills (advance medical directives)

**2023** | SC simplifies procedures for passive euthanasia, introducing a two-tier medical board system and easing earlier procedural hurdles

**2026** | SC allows withdrawal of artificial life support in Harish Rana's case, marking India's first court-approved implementation of passive euthanasia

## LAWS AROUND THE WORLD

Euthanasia is illegal in almost all countries and can even result in a murder conviction for the administering physician. However, some countries have legalised it in very limited circumstances: the patient must be suffering from a terminal illness with no hope of recovery and must be in significant pain. Moreover, the administering physician must have nothing to gain from the patient's death (an inheritance, for example). Some countries have additional requirements, such as forbidding the physician from offering euthanasia (Australia) or requiring at least one additional physician to confirm the diagnosis (Netherlands).

## COUNTRIES ALLOWING EUTHANASIA

**Netherlands** | First country to legalise euthanasia (2002); both active and passive euthanasia allowed under strict medical criteria

**Belgium** | Euthanasia legal since 2002 for adults, and since 2014 for minors in limited circumstances

**Spain** | Active euthanasia legal since 2021 for patients with serious, incurable conditions who meet strict requirements

**Canada** | Medical assistance in dying is legal for adults with grievous and incurable medical conditions

**New Zealand** | Assisted dying legal since 2021 for adults with terminal illness expected to cause death within six months

**Switzerland** | Assisted suicide legal if there is no personal gain involved

**UK** | Active euthanasia illegal, but passive euthanasia and living wills are permitted

**US** | Active euthanasia is illegal federally, but several states allow physician-assisted dying for terminally ill patients

**Australia** | Voluntary assisted dying is legal for terminally ill adults

**Research:** Rajesh Sharma

# HC: Allow unrelated donors to give kidney for transplant

Srishti.Lakhotia @timesofindia.com

**Kolkata:** Two renal-failure patients, including one from Madhya Pradesh, got a shot at recovery after Calcutta HC permitted unrelated donors to donate their kidneys. The March 6 order came after health and family welfare department's authorisation committee blocked the process based on 'general suspicion'.

Both patients were on the provisional list for organ transplant and had submitted documents seeking approval for living unrelated donors but their applications were rejected, disregarding reports by police and the subdivisional officer (SDO), who found nothing wrong.

Justice Krishna Rao directed the authorisation committee to grant permission within 24 hours and issued instructions to the respective hospitals where the surgeries are to take place.

**The health and family welfare department had rejected applications of both patients, disregarding approvals by the police and the subdivisional officer**

The Kolkata woman was diagnosed with kidney failure in Nov 2021. A family friend volunteered out of "affection and not for any other consideration". A verification report from SDO, Barrackpore subdivision, said there were no unofficial financial dealings, but the committee refused permission. The transplant surgery of the MP woman, now a resident of Kolkata, had been stalled on similar grounds after being diagnosed with kidney failure in Feb 2024. A friend of her husband had volunteered to donate on "humanitarian grounds".

# Lift foodgrains till June in advance: Centre to states

**New Delhi:** Govt has asked states and Union territories to lift from the central pool rice and wheat under the free foodgrain scheme for three months in advance (till June) and distribute them to beneficiaries immediately, reports **Dipak Dash**.

This directive comes as govt warehouses are brimming with rice and wheat stocks and little space is available for storing the fresh procurement of wheat which will start in the next few weeks.

"In view of upcoming procurement season in the country and consequent bottlenecks faced by states/UTs for efficient logistics and storage, it has been decided that states/UTs will lift the foodgrains allocated up to June 2026 under NFSA in advance and distribute them among the beneficiaries immediately," the food ministry said in a communication to state food secretaries.

It also directed Food Corporation of India (FCI) to ensure sufficient availability of foodgrains in its godowns.

COMING UP
TOI presents a round-up of forthcoming key events and birthdays of notable personalities. Scan the QR code to post your wishes
March 13
Derek O'Brien
Trinamool Congress MP and former quizmaster
derekobrienmp
derekobrienmp
March 14
Aamir Khan
Actor and filmmaker behind films like 'Lagaan', '3 Idiots' and 'Dangal'
Rohit Shetty
Director-producer known for high-octane action films & the 'Singham' franchise
iamrohitshetty
itsrohitshetty
March 15
Honey Singh
Rapper and music producer who gave hits like 'Brown Rang' and 'Desi Kalakaar'
asliyoyo
yoyohoneysingh
Alia Bhatt
National award-winning actress known for 'Gangubai Kathiawadi', 'Raazi' and 'Gully Boy'
aliaa08
aliaabhatt
Mohammed Siraj
Fast bowler who represents India across Tests, ODIs, and T20Is
mdsirajofficial
mohammedsiraj official
Abhay Deol
Actor and producer of offbeat films like 'Dev D' & 'Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara'
AbhayDeol
abhaydeol
Oscar Time
The 98th Academy Awards to take place in Los Angeles
March 16
Rajpal Yadav | Character actor in films like 'Hungama' and 'Bhool Bhulaiyaa'
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Events
Wholesale Inflation data for Feb to be released
Polling for 37 Rajya Sabha seats across 10 states

# Shabir gets bail in terror funding case

**New Delhi:** Supreme Court on Thursday granted bail to Kashmiri separatist Shabir Ahmed Shah in a terror funding case on the ground of delay in trial. Shah was arrested in June 2019 and arraigned as an accused in the second supplementary chargesheet filed by NIA on Oct 4, 2019. NIA alleged that he played a key role in building a separatist movement in J&K, paying tribute to the families of slain terrorists, receiving money through hawala transactions and raising funds through LoC trade. TNN

# Five men rape, kill 16-yr-old girl in Bihar's Saran; 1 arrested, 4 on run

Kshitiz@timesgroup.com

**Patna**: Five men allegedly raped and murdered a 16-year-old girl in Bihar's Saran district late Wednesday.

Police arrested one accused and were hunting for the other four. The girl's sister said all five perpetrators were known to her family and lived in the same village. The Class X student lived with her mother and sister. Her father works outside the state, police said. Her mother alleged that one of the accused had earlier tried to rape the girl.

On Wednesday evening, the teenager had gone towards their old house in the village. Meanwhile, all five accused also arrived at the spot. "They together dragged her away and sexually assaulted her. My daughter kept screaming for help. We reached the site after hearing her cries," her mother alleged.

Seeing the villagers, the accused grabbed her by the legs, dragged her and threw her in the well inside before fleeing, her mother said.

# HC orders 24x7 security for UP man 'stopped from offering namaz at home'

**Prayagraj:** Allahabad high court has ordered round-the-clock security for a Bareilly resident after he alleged he was prevented from offering Namaz at his private property and threatened with potential demolition, **reports Rajesh Kumar Pandey**.

The court made it clear that any violence that afflicts Haseen Khan or his property shall be prima facie understood to have been at the instance of the state — a rebuttable assumption, an inference that a court accepts as true unless proven otherwise by contrary evidence.

The high court passed this order Wednesday after recording Khan's statement that police had forced him to put a thumb impression on a paper without telling him about its contents.

HC had ruled on Jan 27 that individuals don't need permission to pray on private premises, citing the fundamental right to freedom of religion under Article 25 of the Constitution. "Two armed guards shall protect him 24/7 till this court decides otherwise," HC ordered. Khan and some others moved court after their requests to authorities went unheeded despite the Jan 27 verdict.

# Citing studies, govt justifies barring transgenders, sex workers from donating blood

Dhananjay.Mahapatra @timesgroup.com

**New Delhi**: Centre on Thursday justified the exclusion of transgender persons, men having sex with men (MSM) and female sex workers from list of potential blood donors, saying that the decision was not discriminatory but one based on health studies.

Refuting charges of discriminatory exclusion of transgender persons, men having sex with men and female sex workers from donating blood, Centre told Supreme Court Thursday that its policy was based on health studies which found six to 13 times higher incidence of HIV among these groups.

Additional solicitor general Aishwarya Bhati informed a three-judge bench led by CJI Surya Kant that the National Blood Policy focused on sourcing blood from safe donor pools. "Sourcing blood and components from high-risk groups is against the tenets of National Blood Policy," she said.

Health ministry said in its affidavit, "The determination of population groups that should be excluded from being blood donors is done by subject experts based on scientific evidence. There is substantial evidence to show that transgender persons, men having sex with men and female sex workers are 'at risk' for HIV, Hepatitis B or C infections."

Citing the annual report of department health and family welfare for 2020-21, the ministry said, "HIV prevalence among Hijras/transgenders, men who have sex with men and female sex workers is six to 13 times higher than adult HIV prevalence. "Similar restrictions for blood donors in respect of population groups with a high prevalence of HIV and other TTIs (Transfusion-Transmitted Infection) exist all over the world. For instance, in most European countries, sexually active MSM are permanently deferred from donating blood," it said.

**Centre told SC that its policy was based on health studies which found six to 13 times higher incidence of HIV among transgender persons, men having sex with men and female sex workers**

"Blood transfusion services must ensure that blood/components are readily available by ensuring adequate collection, accessible enough to reach where it is most needed, affordable enough for the public at large, ensure safety against TTIs and of standard quality which provides requisite clinical benefit," said the report. Petitioner Thangjam Santa Singh had challenged the 2017 rules and requested the court to strike it down as unconstitutional.

"The issues raised by petitioners fall within the domain of the executive, aided by medical, scientific and other technical experts, guided by evidence as well as their own professional experience," it added. Bhati said, "The issue must also be judged from the lens of a public health perspective and not merely from an individual rights perspective, being mindful of practical realities of unequal access to quality healthcare in a vast & diverse nation."

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T. A. Singh
1.1.40 - 11.3.2026

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Nivedita & Dhruv
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*Followed by Burial*
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*In Grief:*
Wife, Children, In- laws, Relatives & Friends
*Viewing at home on*
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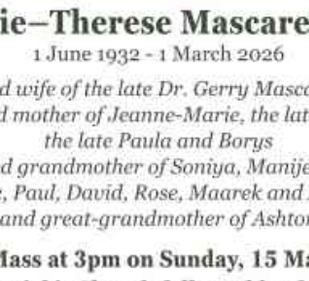

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1 June 1932 - 1 March 2026

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*Devoted mother of Jeanne-Marie, the late Mark, the late Paula and Borys*
*Cherished grandmother of Soniya, Manijeh, Meha, Anne, Paul, David, Rose, Maarek and Anya and great-grandmother of Ashton*

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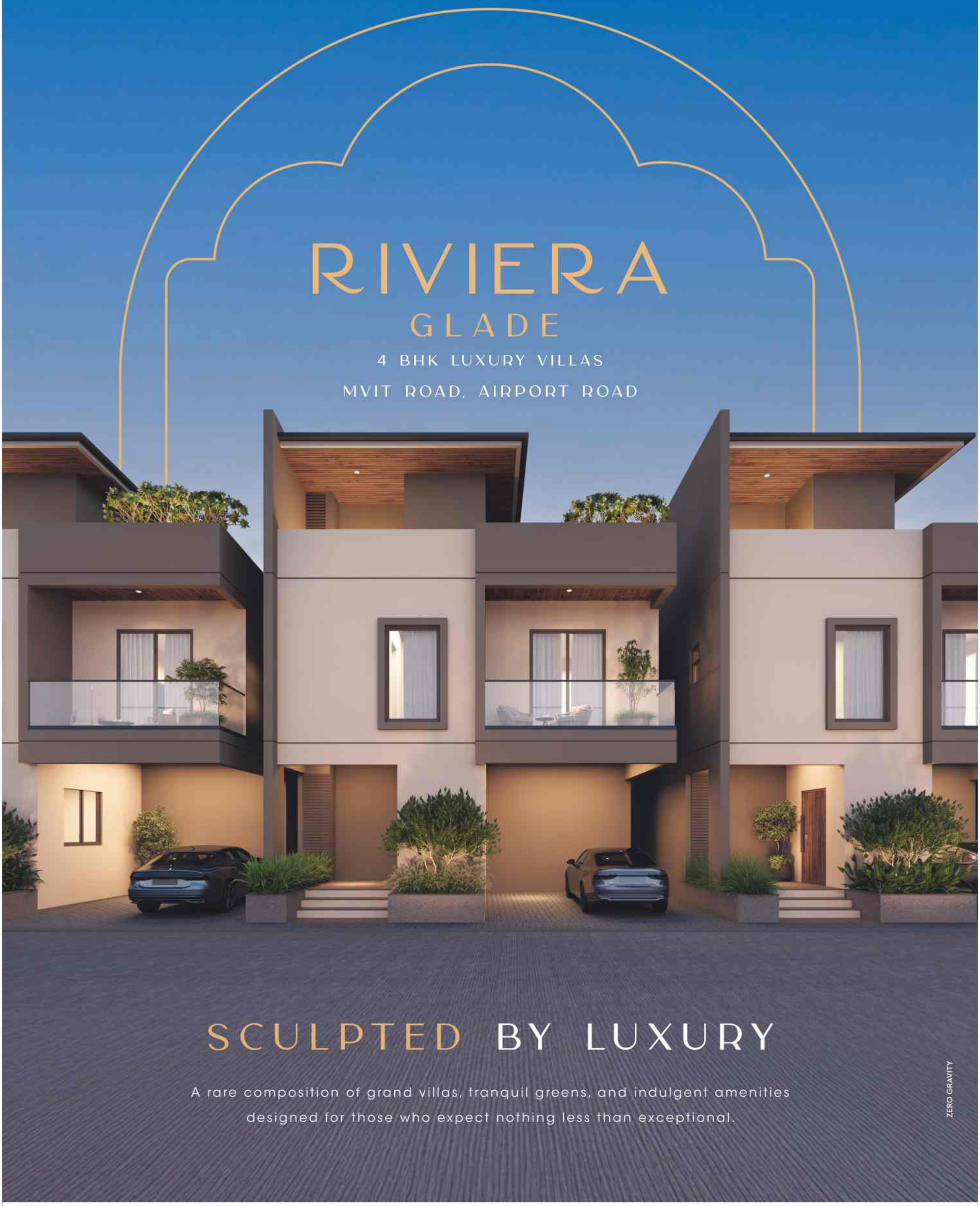

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CONTRAPUNTO

I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, its stupidity

– DWIGHT D EISENHOWER

# Mad Math

*Iran's hurt, but war isn't going well for US, its Arab allies, and the rest of us. Numbers show the pain ahead*

What if this isn't war but "a little excursion", as Trump told Republican lawmakers on Monday? A colonialist's hunting expedition. It gels with his other remark about ending it "soon", because there's "practically nothing left" to target. It also explains why Trump's W Asia adventure is bereft of strategy. Day 1, Khamenei's taken out with an Israeli Blue Sparrow missile, shutting the door on negotiations. Same day, a US Tomahawk kills 150. Turns out they are schoolgirls – targeting info was outdated.

Since then, nothing's turned out the way Trump and Bibi imagined it. Iranians didn't overthrow their govt, nor did the regime collapse on its own. Iran shut off Strait of Hormuz, although that wasn't in the Trump-Bibi playbook. It started hitting other Gulf states also, aiming for their lifeline – desalination plants. Thirteen days on, it's still launching missiles and drones. Meanwhile, the math of war is working against US and everyone else.

In US, gasoline is 20% costlier already. And if war goes on, it will rise further. Iran's said it will drive crude to an unprecedented $200 per barrel. Can it? Probably not. About 20% of global oil crosses the Strait. Since a 1% drop in supply raises prices by 4%, an 80% rise is possible, which means roughly $110. But, per IMF, just a 10% increase in energy price for a year could raise global inflation by 40 basis points. In the worst case, this Trump-Bibi-engineered energy shock can wipe out half of the world's 3.3% economic growth projected for this year.

And that's just the hit from oil-related inflation. Shipping insurance has increased 4-6 times, fuel for planes has doubled in price. When central banks, including US Fed, put off rate cuts – or hike rates to curb inflation – the damage will be worse. The Strait's blockade has also stalled 30% of world's urea for agriculture, and key industrial inputs like sulphur, aluminium and helium. Unable to move oil, Gulf states are shutting down wells, which can take weeks or months to restart. Trump's Gulf allies are getting bombed, and their economies will likely manage to grow at just 1.8% this year. They are also having second thoughts about relying on US. Meanwhile, US is burning through almost $2bn in munitions daily, and 17 of its installations in the region have been hit. Not to forget, 7 US troops are dead, and 140 wounded. For what? Trump must think, and stop the madness.

# Bye Churchill, Hi Badger

*Not just currency notes, public spaces at large need more homage to wildlife, less to man*

It's bad times for Churchill. Even as people everywhere are grumbling about the Iran war, they are remembering he plotted the 1953 coup d'état, the 'original sin', which poisoned the country's relationship with the West. And in his homeland, Bank of England will be chucking him off the next series of banknotes (along with other historical persons). He will be replaced by native wildlife. That's a cool idea. The Brit discussion of wild possibilities would, however, leave desis unimpressed. Foxes, badgers, hedgehogs, and red deer…from our point of view, that's a very meh list. No tigers, elephants, rhinos, leopards, lions. Heck, RSPCA, their most venerable animal welfare charity, is campaigning for pigeons and rats, tagged as under-appreciated wild animals. Soooo darling. And so out of league with our peacocks, crocodiles, flamingos, cobras.

Indian rupees have featured rhinos, tigers, and elephants. But really, why should this conversation only be about currency? Homo sapiens grab most of the honours across our public spaces. Both ethically and aesthetically, this speciesism sucks. Imagine our town squares, less populated with gentleman statues, and more with whale shark, barasingha, hornbill, and gharial sculptures. Bonus: such choices would sidestep political brawls, over which neta's mug matters the mostest.

Valmik Thapar's *Land of the Tiger* is chaptered across icy mountains, sacred waters, oceans and islands, harsh deserts, and wet forests – underlining the diverse habitats that make India extraordinarily rich in flora and fauna. He also emphasises that this wealth of wildlife has survived here, because of people's special relationship with other living creatures, who share their land. Of course, this inheritance is endangered today. Daily, we are devising new ways to turn wild habitats into roads, malls, highrises, dams, airports. What we need to start doing is rewilding, fix some of what we have destroyed. That's animals' right, and that's what's good for our well-being too. And btw, the sterling will only be saying bye to Churchill, not to Charles. Shucks.

# We've been warned

*Watching a movie could soon be very frightening*

**Jug Suraiya**

I'm watching a TV series in which one of the main characters, a hard-bitten Texas oilman, is a chain-smoker, barely stubbing out one cigarette before lighting another. Each time he smokes, or is about to smoke, a warning pops up on the screen: Smoking is injurious to health.

Smoking is indeed extremely injurious to anyone's health and that's why, very sensibly, more and more people are giving it up. But just in case, through a memory lapse, or for some other reason, someone continues smoking, or an ex-smoker resumes the pernicious habit, it's become mandatory to have the warning repeated over and over, to remind people just how frightful smoking is.

Then I noticed that, apart from smoking, people in the show were drinking a lot of colas and other fizzy drinks, and eating ice cream, and cookies, and chocolates, all of which will load you up to the raised eyebrows with sugar.

Though not as bad a villain as smoking, sugar is high up on the list of health no-nos, as even a little of it can spike blood glucose, and it is a major cause of obesity, which, in turn, can lead to diabetes. Shouldn't scenes showing people eating and drinking sugary stuff also carry a warning? Sugar is injurious to your medical bills.

**jugular***vein*

After smoking and sugar, a third S to invite a warning could be speeding. High-speed car chases in which four-wheeled vehicles screech around corners on two wheels, smash through plate glass to plough through crowded malls, scattering people like confetti, have become mandatory in action movies.

With India having the highest number of road deaths in the world, is it time to put a brake on fast driving, with on-screen car chases being appropriately red-flagged? Speeding can be injurious to your longevity.

Action movies also showcase parkour acrobatics, with stuntmen and women leaping from rooftop to rooftop, and engaging in other death-defying acts. Stunting can be injurious to your life insurance company.

Having received all these frightening and frightful warnings, by the time you reach a movie's conclusion, you might well feel we too have come to THE END.

# Harish Rana & Meaning Of Compassion

*SC nod for withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment in special cases, addresses some apprehensions doctors have in taking such calls. Rest of the reassurance needs to come from govts & hospitals*

**Dhvani Mehta**

On March 11, a two-judge bench showed us what it looks like when the Supreme Court performs the function it is meant to. In a masterfully written judgment, a pleasure for lawyers and doctors alike to read, judges clarified the legal position on withholding/withdrawing life-sustaining treatment. They gave relief and closure to Harish Rana's family. The family did everything in their power, over the last 12 years, to secure dignity for their son, who has been in a permanent vegetative state.

Harish's case was the first time SC has had to apply its own concepts and guidelines on withholding/withdrawing life-sustaining treatment. It first laid them down in 2018, in *Common Cause vs Union of India*, when SC was considering the question in the abstract.

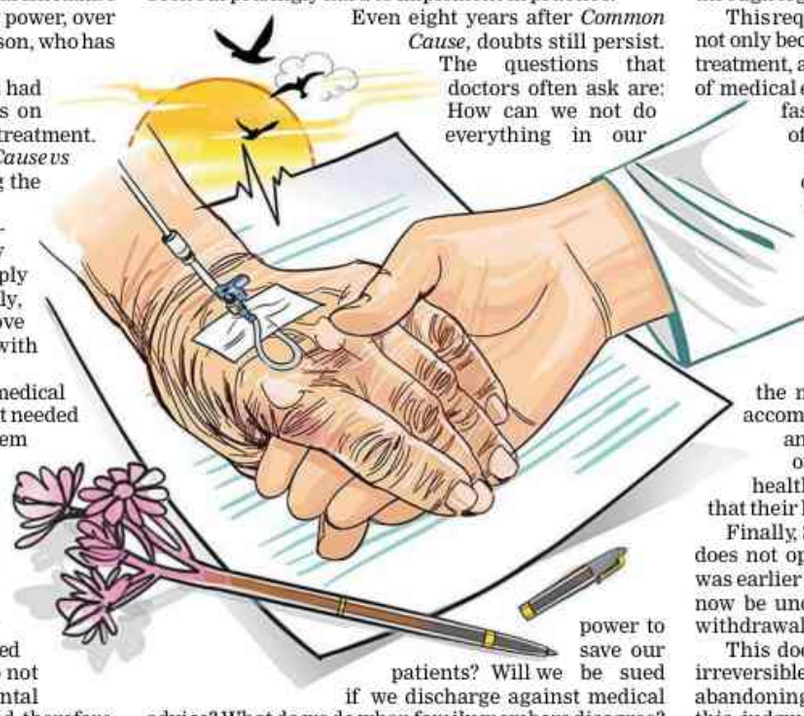
Judges were conscious of the momentousness of this throughout the hearings – they have been measured with their words, deeply empathetic in their interactions with the family, respectful of lawyers on both sides, and above all, framed and answered legal questions with depth, and clarity of thought.

SC affirmed fundamental principles of medical law and ethics that have always existed, but needed the weight of judicial reasoning, to drive them home. Doctors owe a duty of care to their patients, to act in their best interests. Instead of an imperative only to save life, sometimes, this will mean *not offering or discontinuing* treatment. Treatment that's artificially prolonging suffering, causing more harm than benefit.

Patients with decision-making capacity have an unconditional right to refuse unwanted medical treatment. Even for those who do not have this capacity, there exist fundamental rights to dignity and bodily integrity, and therefore, a corresponding duty to continually evaluate the appropriateness of medical treatment. Evaluating the best interests of a patient requires not only clinical judgment, but an understanding of their values and preferences as a person.

SC ensured that this was done in Harish's case through expert medical boards, in accordance with *Common Cause* and multiple conversations with his family.

What's required of doctors is very clear – act in accordance with responsible clinical standards, take time to communicate with, and understand, your patient and their family, prepare them for difficult decisions, and above all, have the humility to recognise that there are limits to medical treatment. This has been surprisingly hard to implement in practice.



Even eight years after *Common Cause*, doubts still persist. The questions that doctors often ask are: How can we not do everything in our power to save our patients? Will we be sued if we discharge against medical advice? What do we do when family members disagree? How can we confirm the authenticity of advance medical directives?

Some of these doubts have been set to rest with SC's judgment. However, for procedural issues, like creating medical boards, and repositories of advance medical directives, the responsibility is that of Centre and states. So far, only Goa, Karnataka, and Maharashtra have partially put in place systems that will allow compliance with *Common Cause* guidelines. Odisha and Tamil Nadu have taken steps in that direction.

Questions regarding applicability in different healthcare settings, identifying the next of kin, and addressing the withholding/withdrawal of treatment in children, can only comprehensively be addressed through legislation, which GOI must pilot.

This requires recognition that such action is needed not only because of an SC order. Stopping inappropriate treatment, and providing palliative care, are at the heart of medical ethics. This is of particular importance in a fast-ageing population, with a rising burden of non-communicable diseases.

Decisions to limit treatment are taken only in 22-36% ICU cases in India (Lancet Commission on the Value of Death, 2022). Two out of three cases, though, are simply discharging people against medical advice, without providing any other care. Note, also, that less than 4% of people, who need palliative care, are able to access it. We face a real crisis of compassion.

It's commendable that SC recognised the need for an appropriate withdrawal plan, accompanied by a framework to ensure palliative and end-of-life care. It is now the responsibility of our health systems to act on it – private healthcare providers cannot complain anymore that their hands are tied by the law.

Finally, SC was at pains to clarify that its judgment does not operate in the realm of 'euthanasia'. What was earlier unhelpfully called *passive euthanasia*, will now be understood correctly as the withholding, or withdrawal, of life-sustaining treatment.

This does not 'cause' death, it allows an existing, irreversible condition to run its natural course, without abandoning the patient. Harish's family wants that this judgment helps ease suffering for many more. SC has shown the way forward. It's time for the medical community and govts to follow.

*The writer is co-founder, Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy, and was part of the legal team that represented Harish Rana and his family in SC*

# How The Tikkiwala's Feeling The Heat Of US-Iran War

**Disrupted LPG supply has brought India's street staples, all flame-intensive cooking, to a halt. The food gig economy, 56% of the sector, which feeds & employs millions, is showing its deep vulnerability**

**Amin Ali**

For some days now, 'offer of the day' messages, of neighbourhood food stalls and diners, have been replaced by posts of 'regret', for their inability to serve bestsellers. Restaurants are removing popular dishes from menus. Cloud kitchens are tagging items 'temporarily unavailable'. Delivery apps show kiosks and outlets are pausing signature offerings, which require cooking on gas stoves. Street vendors, selling hot food, are nowhere to be seen. And papdi and golgappa sellers are stumped by punditry that they "look for baked variants". All of this, because commercial LPG deliveries have slowed or stopped.

Commercial LPG cylinders power the majority of India's restaurant-kitchens and street-food stalls. Fuel availability is not simply a supply chain issue, but also a stark reminder of the fragility of one of India's most important employment and consumption engines – when a single critical input is disrupted.

Pan-India, restaurants, hostels, street-food stalls, canteens and catering services have either cut down menus or temporarily shut operations. Even among larger restaurants, some are introducing 'crisis menus', with fewer dishes that require less cooking time, while others are reducing operating hours. Popular dishes, such as dosa, bhatura, poori, tikki, tawa & wok preparations, and hot meals, have disappeared from menus.

GOI has, understandably, prioritised household LPG consumption to ensure domestic kitchens function. But, that has created a cascading problem, for commercial kitchens, outlets that depend entirely on LPG.

Restaurant industry bodies have written to petroleum ministry, seeking urgent intervention, and clarity, on commercial LPG supply. Top restaurateurs and industry observers caution, that, a significant number of restaurants could be forced to temporarily shut operations, if the crisis lasts more than a few days. They estimate 50-60% of restaurants could face closure, if commercial LPG supply isn't restored quickly.

**Majority unorganised** | The numbers tell a grim story. Per National Restaurant Association of India (NRAI)'s India Food Services Report, food services' market was valued at ₹5.7L cr in 2024, projected to grow to ₹7.8L cr by 2028. This makes it one of the country's most significant consumption sectors.

But the sector's composition is the most revealing. Of total market size in 2024, about ₹2.5L cr is from organised segments, that's branded restaurants, chains and formal dining establishments. The larger share, ₹3.2L cr, or 56%, is the unorganised sector.

That is where the real vulnerability lies.

**Street vendors** | India's informal food economy, comprising street vendors, hawkers, small stalls, roadside carts and neighbourhood kitchens, depends almost entirely on LPG cylinders. They typically operate out of small carts, or makeshift setups, where storing spare cylinders is not possible. Many rely on frequent deliveries, to keep their stove or wok running through the day.

If replacement supply does not arrive, business stops immediately. They operate in a highly price-sensitive environment with the thinnest of margins. Raising their prices, or absorbing rising costs, are both suicidal for their business.

This is why the impact of LPG shortage was visible on the streets, almost immediately. Vendors selling tikkis, chaat, samosa, noodles, fried rice, fried chicken or hot gulab jamun are unable to operate because they cannot secure cooking gas. That's livelihood loss, also, for the daily wagers who help run the stalls.

India's street food culture is built on flame-based cooking. The sizzling tawa for besan chilla, uttapam or parantha, the bubbling oil for pooris, samosas, bhaturas and fried fish or chicken, the dosa griddle that runs through the evening rush, tandoors for bread or chicken & paneer tikka preparations, and intense heat of Chinese-style woks tossing noodles, fried rice or fried chilli chicken, all depend on LPG.

**Gig economy** | Food services sector's contribution is often underestimated in conversations on the economy. A single restaurant, even a modest one, can directly and indirectly, employ dozens of people. Kitchen staff, servers, cleaners, delivery workers, suppliers, vendors and logistics providers, all depend on that one establishment. The gig economy is, almost entirely, run by the restaurant industry, sustaining millions of livelihoods.

Cooking, serving, cleaning, managing kitchens and delivering food are human-driven services; hospitality sector is most resistant to full automation. These are also the jobs economists believe will continue even as AI reshapes other industries.

Since food services sector is a huge employer, LPG disruption becomes a major crisis. Suggestions that restaurants can simply switch to electric hot plates or induction cooktops, show their lack of awareness, of both reality and scale of the industry. Lakhs of tea stalls will disappear without gas supply. High-heat cooking techniques depend on flame intensity that small electric devices cannot easily replicate. For street vendors, such transitions are not even feasible.

Recognising the ₹5.7L cr food services industry as an essential economic engine, ensuring operational needs of the sector as an employment- and revenue-generating ecosystem, and protecting it from supply disruptions, must, therefore, also be a policy priority.

*Ali writes on food & restaurant industry*

**Calvin & Hobbes**

**Sacred***space*

*Someone might say, to put together the whole complicated machinery of computers is intelligence. So each one according to his predilection, according to his prejudice, bias, conclusion, will say, 'This is intelligence'. But to investigate what is really intelligence we must negate what is not intelligence...*

**J Krishnamurti**

# The Source Code Of Artificial Intelligence

**Deepak Ranade**

In his very inimitable style that blends clarity, with a dash of provocation, Nobel laureate and physicist Richard Feynman remarked: "If our small minds, through some convenience, divide this world, into pieces – physics, biology, geology, astronomy, psychology, and so forth – keep in mind that nature is unaware of it!"

Human knowledge and intelligence are fragmented into multitudes of domains and distributions. Modern-day artificial intelligence (AI) stands at the summit of integrating and processing all these domains at incredible speeds. It is a highly efficient, protocol-driven form of computational intelligence. Its efficiency lies mainly in access to terabytes of data, speed of data retrieval, and picosecond processing and output generation.

Much of today's AI operates as a black box. Models are based on vast datasets, and their internal workings often oblivious even to their creators. Modern neural networks can contain millions, sometimes billions of adjustable parameters. There lies an inherent limitation of mistaking noise for meaning. Neural networks produce outputs that look fluent, confident, and sometimes uncannily intuitive and insightful. They seem to provide succour by providing speedy solutions to the gluttonous appetite of man's quest for control, and conquest.

Unlike the cultivated, functional, logic-based AI, 'natural intelligence' has an aesthetic to it. An intelligence characterised by adaptive complexity, organic syntropy, and a deep, intuitive synergy with the environment.

Richard Feynman viewed this higher 'intelligence' as a vibrant, interactive, incredibly complex system operating as a unified, seamless, and unpredictable whole. For Feynman, investigating the 'intelligence' of nature was not about finding a final, absolute truth, but rather about appreciating its 'beauty and harmony' through a continuous process of discovery.

Despite all these technological advances and upgrades, AI still pales in comparison to the innate, organic intelligence of nature. An intelligence blessed with sanctity of discretion and compassion for each of its creations. Knowledge that has not been broken up into fragments by narrow, myopic self-centred indulgences. A self-rectifying intelligence that can genetically engineer strands of DNA to outsmart and rein in the exploitative, selfish, destructive, inconsiderate machinations of one of its own. An intelligence that has honed the skill of walking the razor's edge without swaying to any extreme or playing favourites.

THE SPEAKING TREE

An intelligence with benevolence that celebrates and evolves. An impartial, unbiased intelligence sans any ego. A truly democratic intelligence – of nature, for nature, by nature.

As aptly stated by Arthur Compton, physicist, who won a Nobel Prize for discovery of the Compton effect, "For myself, faith begins with the realisation that a supreme intelligence brought the universe into being and created man. It is not difficult for me to have this faith, for it is incontrovertible that where there is a plan there is intelligence. An orderly, unfolding universe testifies to the truth of the most majestic statement ever uttered: 'In the beginning God…'"

Amidst all this hype, apprehension and hysteria surrounding AI and the threat it can pose to mankind, natural intelligence most certainly will triumph and have the last laugh in this game where there are no victors. Only survivors with the eternal will to survive and celebrate.

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# INDIA'S 50-OVER QUESTION

**As India embarks on a new cycle that will culminate in the ODI World Cup next year, will Sanju and Ishan's T20 WC heroics be good enough for them to be candidates in the set up?**

Reuters

IN FOCUS: Sanju Samson (right) and Ishan Kishan

**ISHAN IN ODIs AND LIST A CRICKET**

| | M | I | NO | Runs | HS | Ave | 100 | 50 | SR | 6s | Ct | St |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ODIs | 27 | 24 | 2 | 933 | 210 | 42.40 | 1 | 7 | 102.19 | 33 | 13 | 2 |
| List A | 117 | 110 | 7 | 4023 | 210 | 39.05 | 7 | 20 | 98.31 | 149 | 112 | 14 |

**210** Runs off 131 balls vs Bangladesh in an ODI in Chattogram on Dec 10, 2022, is Ishan Kishan's personal best in List A cricket.

**24y 145d** At this age, Ishan had become the youngest to register a double hundred in ODIs. At present, the record is held by Shubman Gill, who posted a double century — 208 off 149 balls — at the age of 23 years 132 days vs New Zealand in Hyderabad on Jan 18, 2023.

**SANJU IN ODIs AND LIST A CRICKET**

| | M | I | NO | Runs | HS | Ave | 100 | 50 | SR | 6s | Ct | St |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ODIs | 16 | 14 | 5 | 510 | 108 | 56.66 | 1 | 3 | 99.60 | 22 | 9 | 2 |
| List A | 130 | 121 | 16 | 3599 | 212* | 34.27 | 4 | 19 | 90.56 | 15 | 127 | 15 |

**212*** Runs off 129 balls for Kerala in the Vijay Hazare Trophy fixture vs Goa at Alur on Oct 12, 2019 remains Sanju Samson's career-best score in List A cricket.

**108** Samson's only ODI century against South Africa in Paarl on Dec 21, 2023 ensured an Indian win by 78 runs.

—**Stats:** Rajesh Kumar

**Dwaipayan.Datta**@timesofindia.com

The bubbly of euphoria of the T20 World Cup triumph was still spilling over when Gautam Gambhir was asked whether the current Indian white-ball generation is the best in business. The coach was at his pragmatic best when he said: "I am not so sure when you've lost two bilateral ODI series recently."

The indications were quite clear. The T20 World Cup win is all fine but it's time to look forward because India will be judged in the next one-and-a-half years on its ODI performances. Reason: The ODI World Cup in South Africa in October-November 2027.

While the Indian T20 team has been a force of nature in the last couple of years, the ODI team has stuttered a bit. While the Mr Match-winner for India, Jasprit Bumrah hasn't played a single ODI since the 2023 World Cup final, the results haven't always been that convincing.

In 2024, India lost an ODI series in Sri Lanka, one in Australia in 2025 and one at home to New Zealand earlier this year. In between, there was a Champions Trophy triumph in Dubai, but those matches were played in designer spin-friendly conditions which won't be replicated in South Africa.

That brings us to a pertinent question — is India lacking something in the ODI format?

Given the way new-age white-ball cricket is being played, one may be tempted to say it is the explosivity in the batting department that can be an area of discussion. Of course, ODIs are not T20s – which is mostly sixth gear cricket – and you need a little bit of balance in the 50-over format. Still, it won't be a bad time to ask whether some of the T20 superstars who have the wherewithal to play the longer format should be looked at in ODIs in the lead-up to the World Cup.

The two obvious names that can come up for immediate discussion are that of Sanju Samson and Ishan Kishan. Sanju made the difference at the most crucial stages of the T20 World Cup while Ishan is a proven player in 50 overs – boasting of a highest score of 210 in ODIs. Sanju, on the other hand, has an impressive ODI average of 56.66 and a strike-rate of 99.60.

Former India batter WV Raman feels Sanju has all the elements in his game that can make him a success in ODIs. "He is a terrific player and whatever problems he was having with his temperament, he has addressed that. I am convinced that Sanju has the game to succeed in ODIs," Raman told **TOI**.

But then, the question begs: Where is the vacancy? Sanju is essentially an opener and India's two current ODI openers are Rohit Sharma and Shubman Gill. Rohit has been a little up and down in the only format that he plays, while Shubman is team captain. Former national selector Devang Gandhi added the name of Yashasvi Jaiswal to the list. "Next in line is Jaiswal and if a slot opens up, how can you give somebody a go ahead of him? I have nothing against Samson, but let him go back to domestic one-day cricket get runs, and then try for an ODI comeback. That's how the selectors should think," Gandhi said.

Raman, though, is a believer of backing a player when he is in form. "It's for the team management to find a place for Sanju. For me, Sanju is good enough for ODIs," Raman said.

Ishan, meanwhile, may have a little more flexibility in finding a place. The Jharkhand left-hander can play in top-three as well as lower down the order. Additionally, like Sanju, he is a keeper as well and can be a deputy to KL Rahul. "But then, there's Rishabh Pant. What has Pant done wrong to be dropped from the ODI set-up? These are very talented young players we are talking about and they should be handled with care," Gandhi said.

Indian cricket will dive deep into IPL in a couple of weeks' time and as per the recent trend, performances in the two-month tournament will become a serious benchmark for selection across formats.

Ishan, playing at No. 3 for Sunrisers Hyderabad, and Sanju, opening the batting for his new side Chennai Super Kings, will have the opportunity to break every selection door down.

Gandhi, though, argues that shouldn't be the case.

"Don't forget, there are hardly any close-in fielders in T20s. The aim of every bowler is containment. It's not always the case in ODIs," the former India opener said.

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## Always wanted to do a tough job, says Bumrah

**Ahmedabad:** Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah said he relishes taking responsibility in pressure situations and described the T20 World cup defence as one of the most fulfilling of his career.

"I don't want to hide behind, I want to be in the thick of things. I always wanted to do a tough job," Bumrah, who was adjudged the Player of the match, said in a video shared by BCCI after the victory. "When I'm able to make a difference, that gives me so much joy. No better feeling than that. I don't want to hide behind, I want to be in the thick of things," Bumrah, who was adjudged the Player of the match, said in a video shared by BCCI after the victory.

## Gill set to get 2025's best award

**New Delhi:** India's Test and ODI captain Shubman Gill is set to be named Cricketer of the Year at the BCCI's annual awards to be held here on March 15.

The 26-year-old amassed 983 runs in Tests, including 754 in the drawn away series against England in 2025, at an average of over 70. His ODI runs tally stood at 490, including 188 runs during title-winning Champions Trophy. PTI

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# ‘Playing for India, mind becomes stronger than the body’

**It’s been acclaimed as the knock of the century. No other innings evokes such fond memories and awe as VVS Laxman’s 281 at the Eden Gardens in 2001. The stylish Hyderabadi’s chutzpah and steely resolve allied beautifully in constructing a magnificent edifice that halted the bull run of Steve Waugh’s rampaging Aussies. Laxman vividly recounts that epic innings for TOI...**

JAC.Gladson@timesofindia.com

TOI Exclusive

**Your tally of 1415 runs is still a record for a domestic season. Did playing quality spinners in the Hyderabad nets help in countering Shane Warne better?**

My dream was always to win the Ranji Trophy for Hyderabad and the 1415 runs I scored in nine matches were really a by-product of trying to contribute towards that goal. Looking back, the 1999–2000 domestic season is very special to me. That season gave me a lot of confidence and reassurance about my game. The 353 I scored in the Ranji semis against Karnataka was another memorable moment because it demanded a lot of concentration, patience and the ability to stay focused for long periods.

Coming into the Indian team after that season, naturally the confidence levels were quite high. But international cricket is always a different challenge especially when you are facing the quality bowling that Australia had at that time.

In Hyderabad, I was fortunate to face some very good spinners in the nets. Those sessions were extremely valuable because they helped me develop methods against quality spin. Of course, nothing can truly replicate the skill and variation of someone like Shane Warne but regularly facing quality spin certainly helped build the confidence and clarity needed to counter him in matches.

**Tell us how did physio Andrew Leipus manage to put you on the park?**

Two days before the Test my back went into a severe spasm and I could barely move. The credit for getting me on the field really goes to Leipus. He worked tirelessly through the night and early morning, giving me treatment, stretching the muscles and managing the pain. Even though I was probably only about 50–60 per cent fit, both Sourav and John Wright wanted me to play the Test. For the entire match I wasn’t physically comfortable. Every movement reminded me of the pain in my back, but when you are representing your country, you simply find a way to endure the pain and keep going and the mind becomes stronger than the body.

**Pain seems to get the best out of you. Eden and then Mohali...**

I wouldn’t say pain brought the best out of me, but those moments certainly tested my resolve. At Eden the situation demanded patience and belief especially while building that partnership with Rahul. In Mohali (against Australia, Oct 2010), the back pain made every movement difficult, but when you are so close to helping your team win, you somehow find the strength to keep going. I feel grateful that on both occasions I could contribute in a way that helped India.

**Since your early days too, the longer you stay at the wicket, better the run flow...**

Early in the innings my focus was always on giving myself time at the crease and understanding the conditions, the pace of the wicket and how the bowlers were operating. Once I spent some time in the middle, my footwork became more decisive and I could pick the length much earlier, which makes a big difference. When that happens, the mind becomes clearer and the shots you practice in the nets start coming naturally in the game. From there it’s about trusting your natural game and being a little more proactive once you are set.

**Picking the length early is clearly the hallmark of your batting. Did you sense that it was your day?**

On that day even though we were under pressure, I felt I was seeing the ball well and my footwork was quite decisive, which helped me control my strokeplay. Picking the length early always gives you that extra bit of time to play your shots. But as a batsman you never really assume it’s going to be your day. The focus is simply on staying in the moment, being disciplined and building the innings session by session.

**In the first innings, Steve Waugh had fielders on the boundary to get you off strike and you were stroking the ball along the carpet...**

LAXMAN

When you are in good rhythm you can still pierce the gaps along the ground and find the boundary. I was timing the ball really well at that stage and even though Steve Waugh had pushed a lot of fielders to the boundary, my focus was on placement. The idea was to stay positive, take most of the strike and continue building the innings without forcing anything.

**You and Rahul were involved in many partnerships for South zone. But here it was different. Rahul came down the order. Did he let it show at any point during that long partnership? And what were the mid-pitch conversations all about?**

Rahul and I had built some memorable partnerships right from our age group cricket. Just about a month before this Test, we had a 300-run stand for South zone against West in the Duleep Trophy. But here the situation was completely different. The match situation was quite grim and when he came in at No. 6, he was incredibly calm and professional. He understood exactly what the team needed and focused on the job at hand. Our conversations were mostly about staying patient, being proactive when the opportunity came and breaking the day into small passages. The key was to keep supporting each other and keep the scoreboard moving.

**The fifth-wicket partnership of 376 runs turned out to be pivotal...**

The immediate focus was on rebuilding the innings and batting time. Once Rahul and I settled in, the idea was to make the bowlers work hard and slowly wear them down. We tried to play to our strengths, rotate the strike and capitalise whenever they offered us an opportunity.

**Since VVS Laxman was in good form in the first innings, when he scored a fluent half-century, coach John Wright and skipper Sourav Ganguly decided to swap his batting position with that of Rahul Dravid in the second innings on the third day. Laxman was promoted to No. 3, while Dravid moved down to No. 6 — a decision that would later become one of the most celebrated tactical moves in Test cricket history.**

As the partnership grew you could sense the pressure gradually shifting back onto Australia. Even after reaching our individual milestones, we never became complacent as the objective was to keep batting as long as possible and ideally get through the entire fourth day.

**Given both your physical condition, playing sessions was a steep climb. How did you break it down?**

Physically it was very demanding, especially in those conditions, but both of us understood how important that partnership was for the team. Both of us had the ability to bat for long periods but we tried to break the day into smaller phases. When you approach it that way it really helps because you are only focusing on the next passage of play. We kept encouraging each other and reminding ourselves that the longer we stayed there the more the pressure would shift back onto Australia.

**The second new ball on the fourth morning was crucial...**

We knew the bowlers would come hard at us. So, the second new ball was a very important phase of the game. Our plan was to stay very compact, play late and leave well outside off stump as much as possible. The idea was to see off that initial spell and not give them any early wickets. Once the shine went off and we got through that period, it allowed us to regain control and start building the innings again.

**And the pressure got to the Australians because boundary balls started flowing?**

When a bowling attack has to keep coming back for long spells without success it can be quite challenging. Once Rahul and I were set, we tried to capitalise whenever they slightly missed their lengths and converted those opportunities into boundaries. That gradually shifted the momentum in our favour.

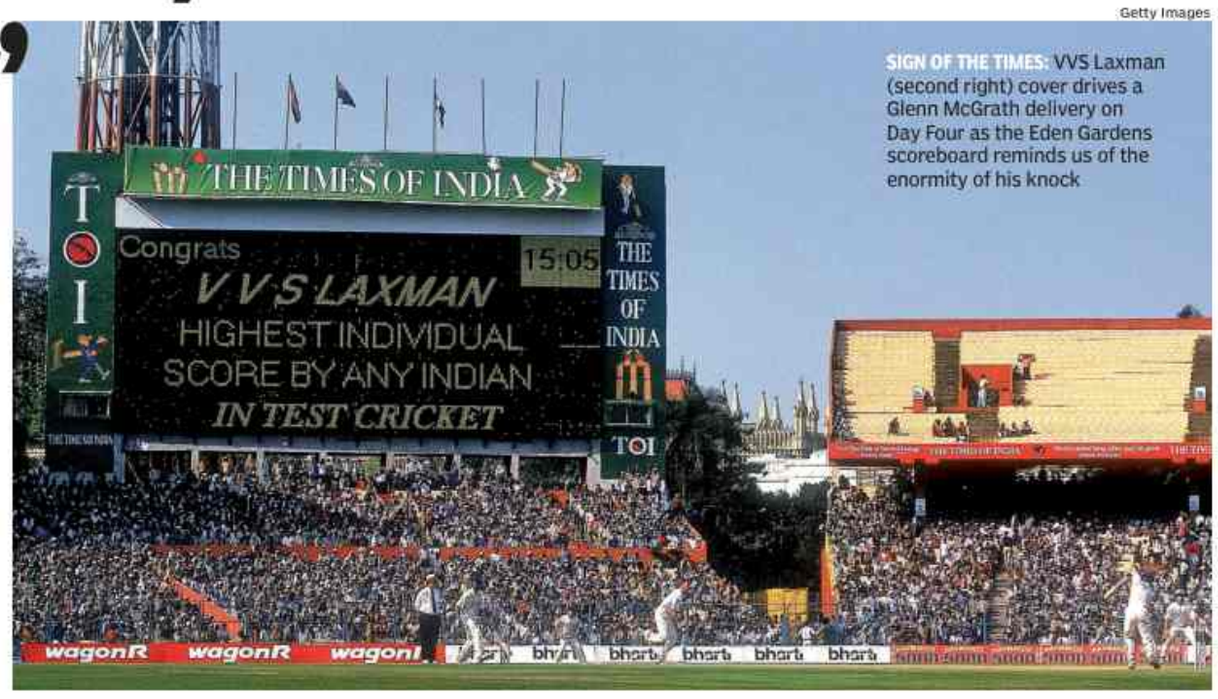
**Did players carrying drinks rile the Aussies too?**

There was a lot of energy around the ground and in the dressing room. The players bringing drinks would sometimes pass on messages or encouragement from the team and the crowd at Eden Gardens was incredibly vocal. I think at times that enthusiasm probably irritated the Australians a little, but for us it was just part of the support we were getting.

**What the Eden Test did for Indian cricket?**

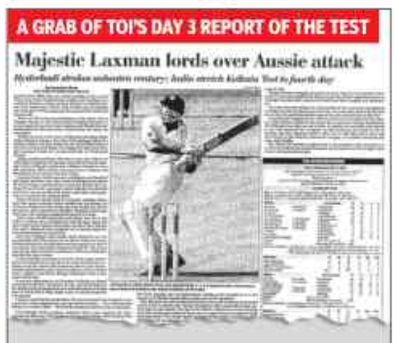
At that time Australia were such a dominant side so beating them after following-on was incredibly significant. That match was very special for Indian cricket because it reinforced the belief that we could come back from extremely difficult situations and still win a Test match. It showed the value of resilience, patience and belief in Test cricket. For us as a team it gave tremendous confidence going forward and proved that if we stayed mentally strong, we could compete with the very best teams in the world. ■

Getty Images




**SIGN OF THE TIMES:** VVS Laxman (second right) cover drives a Glenn McGrath delivery on Day Four as the Eden Gardens scoreboard reminds us of the enormity of his knock

**A GRAB OF TOI’S DAY 3 REPORT OF THE TEST**


Majestic Laxman lords over Aussie attack

Hyderbadi stroker unbeaten century; India stretch Kolkata Test to fourth day

**Day 3 Brief Scores:** Australia 445 in 131.5 overs (Steve Waugh 110, Matthew Hayden 97, Justin Langer 58, Jason Gillespie 46; Harbhajan Singh 7/123) vs India 171 in 58.1 overs (VVS Laxman 59; Glenn McGrath 4/18) and (following on) 254/4 in 75 overs (VVS Laxman 109*, Rahul Dravid 7*)

## ‘VVS scored 281 with my bat’

**By Venkatapathy Raju**

RAJU

I was making a comeback after nearly two years and everything around the team had changed: the fitness levels, the attitude and the mindset.

I still remember the evening after Australia enforced the follow-on. National selector Madan Lal asked us to keep fighting. Laxman then said something that surprised me. He said, “We might win this.” At that stage it felt hard to imagine, but he had the belief.

Laxman’s innings was extraordinary. He was coming down the track to Shane Warne and hitting him even against the spin. That confidence came from years of playing domestic cricket on turning tracks.

There’s another small personal memory: the bat Laxman used to score that famous 281 was actually mine. So, in a small way, that was my contribution to that historic knock. Rahul Dravid came in at No. 6, while Laxman moved up the order. The decision came after discussions between coach John Wright and captain Sourav Ganguly. It turned out to be a smart move.

That series belonged largely to Harbhajan Singh. But Sachin Tendulkar’s spell on Day 5 was crucial. He had the experience of bowling under pressure and he delivered again when the team needed it. For me, the Kolkata Test was special because it turned out to be my last game. Getting the wicket of Mark Waugh made it even more memorable. It was the perfect farewell.

(The former India left-arm spinner spoke to Vishal Menon)

## SNAP SHOTS

### Sumit wins javelin gold

Double Paralympic Games gold medallist javelin thrower Sumit Antil clinched the top podium spot as India enjoyed another gilt-edged day in the World Para Athletics Grand Prix in New Delhi on Thursday. Antil, winner of back-to-back gold medals at the Tokyo and Paris, won with athrow of 69.25 metres. Pushpendra Singh (56.91m) secured the silver, while Poonam Ram (49.48m) took the bronze.

**Kiran bows out, Mannepalli advances:** Kiran George bowed out in the men’s singles pre-quarterfinals after losing to Hong Kong’s Jason Gunawan, while young Tharun Mannepalli advanced after his opponent Kenta Nishimoto retired in the decider at the Swiss Open in Basel. George lost 18-21, 21-16, 16-21 in a round-of-16 match. Mannepalli was leading 16-21, 21-16, 7-2 when the fifth-seeded Nishimoto retired. Meanwhile, in women's singles, Malvika Bansod failed to get past Thailand's world No. 4 Pornpawee Chochuwong, going down 11-21 15-21 in a lop-sided contest. India’s men’s doubles pair of Hariharan Amsakarunan and MR Arjun also crashed out in the pre-quarterfinals, losing out to Chen Cheng Kuan and Lin Bing-Wei of Chinese Taipei 17-21, 11-21 in 32 minutes.

**Diksha, Vani tied-24:** Diksha Dagar and Vani Kapoor were off to good starts with an even par 72 each that placed them Tied-24th after the first round of the Women’s Australian Open in Adelaide on Thursday. Hitaashee Bakshi (77) and Avani Prashanth (77), were T-98 while Pranavi Urs (78) further down. Darcey Harry and Alexandra Forsterling carded 66 (-6) and 67 respectively to sit first and second respectively.

**Lavanya overtakes Jasmine:** Amateur Lavanya Gupta went past overnight leader Jasmine Shekar to grab the lead after two rounds in the fifth leg of the Women’s Pro Golf Tour in Gurugram on Thursday. Lavanya, who was trailing Jasmine by one shot after day one, carded even par 72 while Jasmine shot 2-over 74 and fell behind by one.

**Gunjan advances:** Gunjan, Radhamani Longjam and Chandrika Pujari registered victories as the Indian Youth boxing team recorded strong performances at the World Boxing Futures Cup in Bangkok on Thursday. Gunjan (48kg) secured a convincing 5-0 victory while Radhamani Longjam (57kg) defeated her opponent from Ecuador with an RSC decision. Chandrika Pujari (50kg) added another win to India's tally with a 5-0 victory.

**Magic prevail:** Desmond Bane scored 35 points, including a crucial late three-pointer, to spark Orlando's 128-122 victory over visiting Cleveland on Wednesday, stretching the Magic win streak to five games. **Results:** Orlando 128 bt Cleveland 122; New Orleans 122 bt Toronto 111; New York 134 bt Utah 117; Charlotte 117 bt Sacramento 109; Denver 129 bt Houston 93; LA Clippers 153 bt Minnesota 128.

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## Iran team shouldn’t come to US risking own life, safety: Trump

**Washington:** US President Donald Trump warned Iran’s football team Thursday their “life and safety” would be at risk if they took part in the upcoming World Cup in North America.

Trump’s comments came just two days after he told FIFA chief Gianni Infantino the Iranian players would be welcome despite the Middle East war. “The Iran National Soccer Team is welcome to The World Cup, but I really don’t believe it is appropriate that they be there, for their own life and safety,” Trump said on his Truth Social platform.

The war, triggered by US-Israeli strikes on February 28, has thrown into doubt Iran’s participation at this summer’s men’s football World Cup, jointly hosted by Canada, Mexico and the United States.

Infantino, the head of world football’s governing body, said earlier this week that during a meeting with Trump at the White House they had discussed the “current situation in Iran.” Infantino in Dec created a FIFA peace prize and awarded it to Trump. His comments were the first time the football chief has acknowledged the ongoing war in the Middle East.

Trump weighed in on the case of Iran’s visiting women’s team in Australia. Australia later agreed to grant asylum to five players who decided to stay. AFP

**PULLING OUT?** SINCE **1958 WORLD CUP**, NO TEAM HAS WITHDRAWN AFTER THE FINALS DRAW

While Iran’s withdrawal from the 2026 World has not officially happened at this point, minds at FIFA must now address more urgently the prospect of having to replace the Iranians in the tournament as Trump’s comments put further doubt regarding their participation in football’s showpiece event.

**5** Withdrawals from FIFA WC finals

**1938:** Austria (Annexed by Nazi Germany)
**1950:** India (Travel cost, administrative issues)*
**1950:** Scotland (FA policy, would only go if they won British Championship)
**1950:** Turkey (Travel costs)
**1950:** France (Travel and logistical issues)

**1966 WC qualifiers:** Boycott by 15 African nations protesting limited qualifying spots **15**

*India qualified for the **1950 WC**, because other teams in their group withdrew. India chose to pass up the WC as they traditionally gave the Olympics more importance

## Unbeaten India face Italy

Manne.Ratnakar
@timesofindia.com

Getty Images

**CONFIDENT:** Lalremsiami

**Hyderabad:** Having realised their main objective of qualifying for the World Cup, India now focus on emerging triumphant in the FIH Hockey World Cup Qualifiers. The hosts, who topped Pool B ahead of Scotland on goal difference, will face Italy in the semifinals

**HOCKEY**

at the Gachibowli stadium on Friday. Pool A toppers England take on Scotland in the other semifinal clash.

As Chile, Austria and Ireland have secured the three direct qualification spots, while world No.15 Japan finished fourth in the Santiago leg, India, who are ranked No.9, have already punched their World Cup ticket by storming into the semifinals. The highest-ranked fourth-placed team from these two legs will automatically qualify for the World Cup. With the burden of qualification off their minds, the Indians are keen to give their best against Italy, who finished second behind England in Pool A.

India will once again look to their star forward Navneet Kaur. The seasoned campaigner with four goals — including a hat-trick against Wales — is the joint top scorer of the tournament along with Grace Balsdon of England. The Indian attack is led by Lalremsiami, Sunelita Toppo, Rutuja Dadaso and Sakshi Rani. Bichu Devi has been impressive under the bar. Federica Carta, who had already scored three goals in the tournament, will lead Italy's attack. In the seven matches between India and Italy since 2012, India have won five and drawn one. Playing at home and with a good record against the Italians, India begin favourites.

Chief coach Sjoerd Marijne was impressed with his team. "Securing qualification for the FIH women's World Cup is an important milestone, and the players deserve a lot of credit. They have shown good discipline, composure and attacking intent throughout the pool stage," Marijne said.

**Live, JioHotstar, 7.30 pm**

## FEDE ROAR

**All Nerve & Heart, Valverde Shows Real Madrid The Way With Treble And Grit Against City**

**Madrid:** Federico Valverde’s sensational hat-trick against Manchester City helped Real Madrid put one foot in the Champions League quarterfinals, but his words after the game may prove more crucial still.

The Uruguay midfielder’s 22-minute first half treble stunned Pep Guardiola and the Premier League giants as Madrid racked up a 3-0 last 16 first leg victory on Wednesday, against the odds.

City came into the game as favourites, even playing in the Spanish capital, because of Madrid’s inconsistent form and injuries to Kylian Mbappe, Jude Bellingham and many others.

“We’ve shown that when the team works together we can achieve big things,” Valverde told Movistar.

One of Real Madrid’s biggest problems this season — and last term under Carlo Ancelotti — has been a lack of balance. With Mbappe, Bellingham, Vinicius and Rodrygo on the pitch, Madrid are sometimes ripped open at the back. Against City, with only Vinicius available, Los Blancos played their best match of the season.

Their aim and identity was clear, which has not been the case far too often this season. Every player ran and Valverde’s comment seemed pointed, as if he had grown fed up of playing in a team where that was not the case.

A day before, the 27-year-old said he was willing to die for his teammates, and insinuated he has not always felt the same coming back the other way. “This year, it’s been the case that all eleven of us haven’t been available to defend,” Valverde pointed out.

Reuters

Valverde (left) completes his hat-trick against City

Wearing the number 8 shirt bequeathed to him by Toni Kroos, some consider that image a reflection of Madrid’s problems in a football sense. This season in midfield Madrid have had muscle but not the guile or creativity of Kroos, or departed Croatian maestro Luka Modric. However Valverde demonstrated with his energetic, high-octane performance — even before getting to his superb goals — that another way is possible. But only if everybody is on board. Scoring is not Valverede’s forte. These were his first strikes in the competition since April 2024.

Playing at right-back under Xabi Alonso for most of the first half of the season, Arbeloa restored him to midfield after replacing Alonso in January, and reaped the reward against City.

**Chelsea’s Neto faces punishment for pushing ball boy in 2-5 defeat to PSG**

**Paris:** Chelsea’s Pedro Neto is set to be punished by UEFA for pushing a ball boy during his team’s 5-2 defeat by Paris Saint-Germain.

**Results (Last 16, 1st leg):** Real Madrid 3 (Valverde 20, 27, 42) Man City 0; Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Andrich 46) Arsenal 1 (Havertz 89-pen); Bodo/Glimt 3 Sporting 0; PSG 5 (Barcola 10, Dembele 40, Vitinha 74, Kvaratskhelia 86, 90+4) Chelsea 2 (Gusto 28, Fernandez 57).

## Draper shocks Djoko, enters last-8

World number one Carlos Alcaraz continued his dominant run at Indian Wells, beating Norway’s Casper Ruud 6-1, 7-6(2), while **Jack Draper** upset world number three Novak Djokovic 4-6, 6-4, 7-6(5) on Wednesday to reach the quarterfinals in the California desert.

Alcaraz relied on a near-flawless service game to seize control, racing through the opening

**TENNIS**

set in just 37 minutes after breaking Ruud’s serve three times. Thirteenth-seeded Ruud raised his level but Alcaraz kept his foot on the gas to seal his 15th consecutive victory of the season.

Defending champion Draper claimed one of the biggest wins of his career by beating Djokovic in a deciding-set tie-break after two hours and 35 minutes. Draper, who trailed after dropping the opener 6–4, stormed into the second set by breaking Djokovic early and surviving multiple break points before sealing it with aggressive baseline play. World number two Iga Swiatek delivered a 6-2, 6-0 victory over Czech 13th seed Karolina Muchova. American fifth seed Jessica Pegula overcame Belinda Bencic 6-3, 7-6(5) to secure her first victory in five meetings.

**BHAMBRI-GORANSSON REACH SEMIFINALS**

Yuki Bhambri entered his maiden ATP Masters 1000 semifinal as he and his Swedish partner Andre Goransson defeated Alexander Erler and Andrea Vavassori 6-3, 7-6.

**Results: Men:** 1-Carlos Alcaraz (Esp) bt 13-Casper Ruud (Nor) 6-1, 7-6 (7/2); 27-Cameron Norrie (GBR) bt Rinky Hijikata (Aus) 6-4, 6-2; 11-Daniil Medvedev (Rus) bt Alex Michelsen (USA) 6-2, 6-4. **Women:** 5-Jessica Pegula (USA) bt 12-Belinda Bencic (Sui) 6-3, 7-6 (7/5); 3-Elena Rybakina (Kaz) bt Sonay Kartal (GBR) 6-4, 4-3 retired; 9-Elina Svitolina (Ukr) bt Katerina Siniakova (Cze) 6-1, 1-1 retired; 2-Iga Swiatek (Pol) bt 13-Karolina Muchova (Cze) 6-2, 6-0. AGENCIES

## Anukriti takes lead

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Bengaluru:** Former national champion **Anukriti Bishnoi** from Haryana emerged on top of the leaderboard after the opening round action in the women’s section of the National Tenpin Bowling Championships here on Thursday.

Anukriti scored a total pinfall of 964 across the first block of six games. Transitioning to the medium oil condition for her second block, she started with a score of 186 and raised the tempo with a high of 235 in game 2. After round one, Anukriti had accumulated a total pinfall of 2071, finishing on top with an average of 172.58. Maharashtra’s Shabeena Kasmani was 23 pins beihnd. The duo was followed by Tamil Nadu’s Sabeena Athica (2031) and Preemal J of Karnataka (1985). **Leaderboard (Kar unless mentioned): Men:** (Rd 2: 18 games): 1. Kishan R (3767, avg: 209.28), 2. Dhruv Sarda (Del, 3714, 206.33), 3 Beni Gopal Lahoti (3630, 201.67), 4. Akaash Ashok Kumar (3620, 201.11), 5. Sahil Punjabi (3576, 198.67), 6. Parthiban J (TN, 3534, 196.33), 7. Prathyek Satya (3531, 196.17), 8. Surendra Babu (3514, 195.22), 9. Soban D (3478, 193.22); 10. Mahipal Singh (TN, 3474, 193).

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**Former IPS officer RN Ravi takes oath as 22nd governor of Bengal; Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar sworn in as Tamil Nadu governor in a simple ceremony**

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# TIMES GLOBAL

THE TIMES OF INDIA, BENGALURU | FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2026

BILLIE EILISH IS IN TALKS TO MAKE HER FEATURE FILM ACTING DEBUT IN AN ADAPTATION OF SYLVIA PLATH'S 'THE BELL JAR'

IT DOES NOT DO TO LEAVE A LIVE DRAGON OUT OF YOUR CALCULATIONS, IF YOU LIVE NEAR HIM.
— J R R TOLKIEN

TIMOTHEE CHALAMET IS FACING FLAK FOR CALLING OPERA & BALLET 'DYING ART FORMS' IN A 2019 CLIP THAT HAS RESURFACED

## Russia urges Israel and US to end Iran war

**Moscow:** Russia on Thursday called on Israel and the United States to end their attacks on Iran and come to the negotiating table. "Russia will continue to take steps to end the escalation in the Middle East as soon as possible and resolve any contradictions by peaceful means," foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told reporters. "The number of victims of the illegal military action of Washington and Tel Aviv among the civilian population of Iran, according to the authorities, is in the thousands," she said. REUTERS

## Italy to exit Iraq base, for now

Italy is temporarily withdrawing all personnel from a military base in Iraqi Kurdistan which came under a drone attack, completing a retreat that was already underway, ministers said Thursday. "A retreat was already planned" before Wednesday's attack, which caused no injuries, defence minister Guido Crosetto told Italian news programme TG1. He stressed it was "only a temporary retreat". AP

## Synagogue incident: Suspect shot dead

An unidentified shooter was killed Thursday after exchanging gunfire with security in an attack on a synagogue in the outskirts of Detroit, Michigan, police said. The gunman was dead following the attack on the Temple Israel synagogue in West Bloomfield. Law enforcement officers flooded the area soon after the incident, amid heightened tension nationwide over the US-Israeli war against Iran. AFP

## Iraq to keep crude output at 1.4m bpd

**Dubai:** Iraq has decided to continue producing crude oil at a level of 1.4 million barrels per day (bpd), oil minister Hayan Abdel-Ghani said on Thursday, according to its state news agency. The minister said that 200,000 barrels per day are being transported via reservoirs through Turkey, Syria, and Jordan, noting that Iraq has put in place a plan to manage the situation. REUTERS

# Trump now says stopping Iran more important than oil spike

## White House Accuses 'Left-Wing Media' Of Pushing 'Fake Narrative'

**Washington:** US President Donald Trump on Thursday said stopping the "evil empire" in Iran was of greater importance to him than oil prices, which have been ruling high since the US and Israel launched a war on Iran on February 28. Iranian attacks on ships and oil infrastructure in West Asia have pushed crude prices above $100 a barrel.

"The United States is the largest Oil Producer in the World, by far, so when oil prices go up, we make a lot of money. BUT, of far greater interest and importance to me, as President, is stopping an evil Empire, Iran, from having Nuclear Weapons, and destroying the Middle East and, indeed, the World. I won't ever let that happen," Trump said in a post on Truth Social.

Launched on Feb 28, Operation Epic Fury against Iran has divided political opinion in the US, with Democrats demanding public hearings with testimony from top Trump administration officials.

White House officials, including secretary of state Marco Rubio, have held classified briefings with lawmakers since the attacks on Iran began. However, there have been claims that Trump has been sending mixed signals on the progress achieved in the war.

NYT

An apartment building damaged by a missile strike in Tehran Thursday

"Here we are well into the second week, and it is still the case that the Trump administration cannot explain the reasons that we entered this war, the goals we're trying to accomplish, and the methods for doing that," Democrat senator Elizabeth Warren was quoted as saying after a classified briefing.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt, in a post on X, accused the "left-wing media" of pushing a "fake narrative" about mixed messaging about the objectives of Operation Epic Fury.

"From the beginning, President Trump and his entire team have consistently laid out clear objectives to the American people about what the US Military seeks to accomplish through these ongoing successful major combat operations," Leavitt said.

"Destroy the terrorist Iranian regime's missiles and raze their missile industry to the ground. Annihilate the terrorist Iranian regime's navy. Ensure the regime's fellow terrorist proxies can no longer destabilise the region and attack our forces; Guarantee the terrorist Iranian regime cannot obtain a nuclear weapon," Leavitt said, spelling out the objectives of Operation Epic Fury.

Extending support to the war, Senate Majority Leader John Thune told reporters in the Capitol on Tuesday, the war could be "generational in terms of its impact."

"Not only for that region, but for the entire world, because they (Iran) continued "to be the largest state sponsor of terrorism in the world. They are on the way to nuclear capability, and they're holding that entire region hostage and American interests as well," Thune said at a weekly press conference.

"So I think this was an important mission to accomplish, and hopefully it'll be accomplished soon," Thune said. PTI

## US to relax shipping law to tame oil prices

The Trump administration plans to issue temporary waivers for a century-old maritime law requiring American-built ships be used to transport goods between US ports as part of its effort to stop surging oil prices, according to people familiar with the matter. The 30-day waivers for the Jones Act would allow foreign tankers to help supply refiners on the East Coast with fuel from the Gulf Coast and elsewhere in the US. BLOOMBERG

## Iran puts forth three riders to end conflict

**New Delhi:** As the US and Israel's military campaign against Iran and the latter's retaliatory strikes move toward their third week, Tehran has laid down three key conditions for ending the conflict.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian late Wednesday night said Tehran remains committed to peace but asserted that the conflict can only end if its demands are accepted by Washington and Tel Aviv.

In a statement posted on social media after holding conversations with the leaders of Russia and Pakistan, Pezeshkian said that Iran's position on ending the war was clear.

"The only way to end this war — ignited by the Zionist regime and the US — is recognising Iran's legitimate rights, payment of reparations, and firm international guarantees against future aggression," Pezeshkian said.

Tehran has maintained that the conflict began after attacks by the US and Israel, and has insisted that it will not agree to a ceasefire without concrete assurances regarding its security and rights.

Meanwhile, the US military has issued warnings to Iranian civilians, advising them to avoid ports that host naval facilities, citing the risk of further strikes. Israel, on its part, has indicated that it still has a long list of potential targets inside Iran, including locations linked to ballistic missile capabilities and nuclear-related infrastructure. IANS

# Pentagon to Congress: In first 6 days of war, US spent over $11.3bn

**Catie Edmondson**

Pentagon officials told US lawmakers on Tuesday in a closed-door briefing on Capitol Hill that they estimated the cost of the war against Iran had exceeded $11.3 billion in the first six days alone, according to three people familiar with the briefing.

The estimate did not include many of the costs associated with the operation, such as the buildup of military hardware and personnel before the first strikes. For that reason, lawmakers expect the number to grow considerably as the Pentagon continues to calculate the costs that accumulated just in the first week.

Still, it appeared to be the most comprehensive assessment Congress had received so far amid mounting questions about the objectives, scope and time frame for the war. The New York Times and The Washington Post reported earlier that defence officials had said in recent congressional briefings that the military used up $5.6 billion of munitions in the first two days of the war.

That is a far larger amount and munitions burn rate than had been publicly disclosed. The Center for Strategic and International Studies had estimated that the first 100 hours of the operation cost $3.7billion, or $891.4 million each day.

The first wave of the bombardment used weapons including the AGM-154 glide bomb, which can cost from $578,000 to $836,000. The Navy bought 3,000 of them nearly two decades ago. Since then, the US military has said it will switch to using far less expensive bombs, such as the Joint Direct Attack Munition. The smallest size of warhead costs about $1,000, and the guidance kit runs about $38,000.

Some Republicans — including senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, chair of the subcommittee that funds the Pentagon — have urged over the course of multiple administrations that the United States ramp up its spending on munitions production.

But other Republicans have balked at ramping up military funding and in recent days have questioned the idea of approving a costly supplemental funding for a conflict they worry could become open-ended. And Democrats have cast considerable doubt on their willingness to back an emergency funding measure for the operation. NYT

# Hezbollah fired 200 rockets in 'biggest barrage' of war: Israel

Israel's military said on Thursday that Hezbollah had fired around 200 rockets at Israel the night before, in what it described as the Lebanese armed group's "biggest barrage" since the war began.

"Last night, Hezbollah timed a simultaneous attack with Iran, firing rockets and drones at towns and communities across Israel," military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani told journalists in a briefing.

"The numbers (are) approximately 200 rockets, approximately 20 UAVs (drones), and combine those with ballistic missiles that were being fired from Iran at the same time." Shoshani said "this was Hezbollah's biggest barrage" since the start of the war.

But he added that "we had a good aerial defence and rapid response, resulting in minimal casualties, only two or three direct hits... and a few civilians were lightly injured".

The Israeli military has been battling Tehran-backed Hezbollah since the group began firing rockets into Israel on the second day of joint US-Israeli strikes on Iran. AFP

## Israel ramps up campaign, hits heart of Beirut

Israeli airstrikes hit two buildings in the heart of Beirut near the Lebanese govt's headquarters on Thursday, ramping up Israel's offensive against Iran-backed Hezbollah and dragging Lebanon deeper into the Middle East war. Israel has pounded Lebanon's south and east and the Hezbollah-controlled southern suburbs of Beirut, killing nearly 700, according to Lebanese authorities. It has also ordered mass evacuations in those same areas, prompting more than 800,000 people to flee their homes. REUTERS

# Iran warns against attack on key islands

**Jerusalem:** Iran's parliament speaker warned on Thursday that attacks on the Persian Gulf islands that form Iran's southern maritime frontier would provoke a new level of retaliation, underscoring how central they are to the country's economy and security.

In a social media post, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf said Iran "will abandon all restraint" if the islands come under attack.

### A strategic asset

Although they account for only a small share of Iran's territory, the islands carry outsized importance because of their oil facilities and strategic location. It was not clear what prompted Qalibaf's remarks, but he was not the first to raise the possibility of an attack on the islands since the Iran war began. The US and Israel both have suggested expanding their list of targets beyond military and nuclear sites.

Planet Labs PBC via AP

A satellite image of Kharg Island

Officials in Israel's govt haven't publicly referenced the island, but opposition leader Yair Lapid has called for striking energy infrastructure on Kharg Island. The small coral island about 33km off Iran's coast is the primary terminal through which nearly all of Iran's oil exports pass. Iran gets a significant share of its revenue from oil, with shipments flowing to countries like China.

### A strike will be disastrous

The island has storage tanks in the south, along with housing for thousands of workers. Gazelles roam freely near the refineries and depots that make Kharg one of Iran's most valuable — and sensitive — assets. JPMorgan's global commodity research team warned this week in an investment note that a strike on the island would have major economic implications. "A direct strike would immediately halt the bulk of Iran's crude exports, likely triggering severe retaliation in the Strait of Hormuz or against regional energy infrastructure."

The three islands have long been a front line in tensions between Iran and Gulf states allied with the US. Iranian forces seized the islands in November 1971, days after the United Kingdom withdrew from the Gulf and just before the sheikhdoms joined to form the United Arab Emirates. Iran maintains military assets and garrisons on the islands. AP

## WAR DAMAGES IRAN'S CULTURAL, HERITAGE SITES

Iran possesses one of the world's richest cultural landscapes, reflecting thousands of years of Persian civilisation. **The country is home to 29 Unesco World Heritage Sites, ranging from ancient imperial capitals and archaeological ruins to historic cities and architectural masterpieces.** In a statement, Unesco said it **contacted all parties in the Iran conflict and shared the geographical coordinates for sites on its world heritage list, as well as for national symbols.** The hope was that they might be spared. Iran said it had installed blue flags, in keeping with international wartime protocol, on all of its cultural and heritage sites to signal to Israeli and US jets that they were protected. But to no avail. **Israel's military said it did not target these cultural sites directly. But it did not respond to questions about cultural sites being damaged as a result of strikes on nearby targets.**

Hall of mirrors in Golestan Palace after air raids

Several internationally protected heritage sites have reportedly suffered damage

### Shapur Khast Castle

On Sunday, **an ancient hilltop castle and military barracks dating to Persia's Sasanian era, from the 220s to 650s AD, was seriously damaged in an airstrike.** The castle, known as Shapur Khast Castle and Falak ol-Aflak, is in Khorramabad, in Lorestan province

### Chehel Sotoun

A video **verified by the NYT shows damage to Chehel Sotoun, a 17-century palace with a Persian garden.** There, the 20 towers of the palace are reflected in a shallow blue pool in the garden, creating the illusion of 40. In Persian, chehel sotoun means 40 columns

Debris at Chehel Sotoun

### Ali Qapu Palace & Chehel Sotoun palace

The **Ali Qapu Palace and the Chehel Sotoun palace and garden in Isfahan**, dating to the 17th-century Safavid dynasty, have sustained serious harm in the air strikes. **Photos and videos show painted murals knocked to the ground, floral tiles broken into pieces, hand-carved wooden panels blown out and hanging off walls and ceilings. Tiny mirrors that had been arranged into ornate stars and hexagons shattered across the floor.** Many consider Isfahan the most magical city in Iran

A file photo of Golestan

### Golestan Palace

One of Iran's cultural icons, the Golestan Palace, was badly damaged **during an attack on a police station in downtown Tehran.** Golestan Palace dates to the 14th century and eventually became the seat of the Qajar dynasty. **Its famed hall of mirrors was shattered, and its symmetrical garden was covered in debris, photos and videos show**

### Jameh Mosque

The **blast waves Monday sent the turquoise tiles of the iconic Jameh Mosque crashing to the ground,** with photographs showing a massive plume of smoke rising from behind. **Jameh, with its brightly coloured minarets and domes covered in Persian calligraphy, is renowned as a gem of Persian architecture**

Text: Farnaz Fassihi, NYT

## Benchmark oil prices have risen 40-50% since war began on Feb 28

▶ Continued from page 1

As oil prices spiked above $100 a barrel, Gulf states continue to bear the brunt of retaliatory attacks from Iran. Images from Bahrain on Thursday showed thick smoke rising after a strike on fuel tanks in Muharraq, with residents told to stay inside and close their windows.

Drones caused damage again at Kuwait's international airport and in downtown Dubai, while Saudi Arabia said it had intercepted drones headed towards its Shaybah oil field and its embassy district.

The Paris-based IEA, a world authority on energy markets, warned Thursday the 13-day conflict "is creating the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market", which would surpass those of the 1970s.

With Gulf states slashing production and oil tankers stuck, benchmark oil prices have risen 40-50% since the US and Israel attacked Iran on Feb 28, threatening to crimp growth and stoke inflation.

Iran's deputy foreign minister said ships from "some countries" were being allowed to cross the strait, without giving details, and denied reports that Iran was laying mines in the waterway. "We want to see that war is not going to be imposed again on Iran," Majid Takht-Ravanchi said in Tehran.

The UN said Thursday the war displaced over three million people in Iran. AFP & REUTERS

## DAILY PLANET

### US deports 4 more 'illegal immigrants' to Africa's Eswatini

Eswatini said it had received four more third-country deportees from the United States on Thursday, bringing the total to at least 19 as the Trump administration continued its crackdown on immigration. Two of the fresh deportees were from Somalia, one was from Sudan and one was from Tanzania. Eswatini is an absolute monarchy ruled by King Mswati III. Previous deportees, arriving in July last year, included nationals of Vietnam, Cuba, Laos and Yemen. US President Donald Trump's administration paid the small southern African country $5.1 million to receive them. Eswatini is one of several African countries to have made such secretive deals with the US.

### Gunman at US university killed after injuring two

A gunman opened fire on Thursday morning at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, injuring two people before being shot dead, according to the university. In an emergency alert, the university said the two injured individuals were transported to hospital and classes and campus operations were cancelled for the rest of the day.

### Ethiopia landslides kill at least 70 people

At least seventy people were killed following landslides that ripped through Ethiopia's southern Gamo Zone earlier this week, regional officials said on Thursday, up from 52 reported earlier. The Gamo Zone communications office said earlier that another 50 may still be missing. The landslides struck after days of heavy rain.

### China-N Korea train arrives in Pyongyang

A passenger train from China arrived in the North Korean capital on Thursday, state media said, after a six-year hiatus since the service was suspended during the Covid-19 pandemic. China is North Korea's largest trading partner.

# China OKs controversial 'ethnic unity' legislation

China approved what it called an "ethnic unity" law on Thursday, which rights advocates warn could further marginalise minority groups such as the Uyghurs. The law, passed by the National People's Congress, formalises policies to promote Mandarin as the "national common language" in education, official business and public places.

China's govt has been accused for decades of pursuing policies to force assimilation across the vast country into the Han majority.

The law aims to "strengthen cohesion" within China, which the legislation argues is undergoing unprecedented social change.

China officially recognises 55 official ethnic minorities within its borders that speak hundreds of languages and dialects.

Yalkun Uluyol, a China researcher at Human Rights Watch, described the new legislation as a "significant departure" from a Deng Xiaoping-era policy that guaranteed the right of minorities to use their own languages.

Educational institutions will now need to use Mandarin as the principal teaching language. Teenagers will now be required to have "a basic grasp" of Mandarin upon completing compulsory education. No minority languages are specifically cited in the new law, although it will likely affect Uyghur, Mongolian and Tibetan speakers. AFP

AP

Ethnic minority delegates at the National People's Congress in Beijing, Thursday

## Ukraine strikes key Russian hub for oil pipelines

Ukraine hit an important hub for Russia's network of crude-export pipelines in the southern Krasnodar region. As a result of Ukrainian drone attack, a large fire broke out at a terminal in Tikhoretsk, where a major oil depot and a pumping station are located, according to a person familiar with the matter, who wasn't authorised to speak publicly.

The facility is owned by Transneft PJSC, Russia's state-run oil-pipeline operator. It didn't respond to a request for a comment on whether export flows or supplies to domestic refineries have been affected.

Emergency officials in southern Krasnodar said a fire spread rapidly to cover 3,800 square meters at an oil depot in the suburbs. The strike is one of the latest in a flurry of Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian oil and gas infrastructure this month as the invasion entered its fifth year. BLOOMBERG

# Balen's party wins majority in Nepal

**Kathmandu:** Nepal's centrist RSP party of rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah won a majority in parliament with 182 seats, Election Commission results showed Thursday.

The March 5 vote elected a new 275-member House of Representatives, the lower house of parliament, with 165 seats chosen directly and 110 through a proportional representation vote. "The counting of votes for the election of members of the House of Representatives... has been completed," Election Commission spokesman Narayan Prasad Bhattarai said in a statement.

In direct elections, RSP won 125 of the 165, and secured another 57 in PR votes, leaving them only two seats short of securing a powerful two-thirds majority.

The Nepali Congress, which was the biggest party in the last parliament, secured 38 seats and the Marxists of now-defeated KP Sharma Oli trailing with 25 seats. The Maoists have seven seats. "A letter has been sent to the concerned political parties today to select the names of the candidates, and submit them to the Commission within three days," Bhattarai said.

The vote was the first since the deadly Sept 2025 anti-corruption protests toppled the govt. The demonstrations, under a loose Gen Z banner, began over a brief social media ban but quickly tapped into broader grievances over corruption.

Shah himself defeated veteran four-time PM KP Sharma Oli — whose govt was ousted in the violence — in his own seat. AFP

## Blocking gender changes on IDs violates EU law, top court rules

**Brussels:** The European Union's top court oruled on Thursday that national legislation barring gender information changes was incompatible with EU law, citing the challenges faced when a person's lived gender identity does not align with official documents.

The case concerned a Bulgarian citizen registered male at birth who has begun hormone treatment and identifies as a woman. She moved to Italy and asked Bulgarian authorities to change her legal gender, name and identification number. Courts denied the request, pointing to national rules that define sex strictly in biological terms and ban changes to gender information.

The European Court of Justice said member states were responsible for issuing identity documents. REUTERS